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ABSTRACT

This guide contains ideas and documents from study circle programs throughout the United States. The guide is organized in five parts that cover the following topics: (1) introduction--what are study circles, how do they function?; (2) basic steps in creating a community-wide program; (3) sample documents including program description, community survey, letter to potential sponsors, press release, tips for recruiting discussion leaders, and evaluation forms; (4) stories of community-wide study circles--Lima, Ohio; Yarmouth, Maine; Los Angeles, California; and (5) appendixes, include a comparison of dialogue and debate; a discussion of the need of positive conflict for democracy; study circles and action; why the interest in study circles; newspaper coverage; and community resources order form. Contains 16 references on collaborative community building. (KC)

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PLANNING COMMUNITY-WIDE STUDY CIRCLE PROGRAMS

A Step-by-Step Guide

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Part 1

Introduction

1

Part 2

Basic Steps in Creating a Community-wide Program

2

Part 3

Sample documents

3

Part 4

Stories of Community-wide Study Circle Programs

4

Part 5

Appendices

5

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Planning Community-wide Study Circle Programs: A Step-by-Step Guide is dedicated to the many people across the country who have invented, refined, and applied the idea of community-wide dialogue. These individuals have each devoted hundreds of hours to this work, and have endured endless quizzing from SCRC staff and others seeking the secrets to their success.

You'll find in these pages ideas and documents from programs all over the country. We note especially the inspired "pledge of participation," originally devised by Selena Singletary, Director, Department of Human Relations, Housing and Neighborhood Services for the City of Springfield, Ohio. Robin Parker, Deputy Attorney General of New Jersey, developed superb prototypes for several other sample documents.

Planning Community-wide Study Circle Programs: A Step-by-Step Guide was developed by the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), a project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc. The goal of SCRC is to advance deliberative democracy and improve the quality of public life in the United States. By promoting small-group, democratic, participatory discussions on social and political issues, SCRC hopes to contribute to a more enlightened and involved citizenry capable of making decisions based on informed judgment.

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Part 1

Introduction

INTRODUCTION 1-1
- What are study circles? 1-2
- What are community-wide study circle programs? 1-3
- What do communities gain from community-wide study circles? 1-3
- How does SCRC support community-wide discussion programs? 1-4
- How is this document organized? 1-5

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1993, thousands of citizens in Lima, Ohio, have taken part in small-group discussions to address some of their community's most pressing issues. The first year of the discussions centered on race relations, an issue the mayor described as the "great silent issue which underlies all of our other concerns." To provide a way for the community to deal with race relations, the mayor's office, The Ohio State University at Lima, and the Clergy Task Force joined together to sponsor discussions among paired congregations across the city. The following year, the sponsors built on the success of those discussions, and encouraged businesses and schools to join the program. The core working group also grew, as the Allen-Lima Leadership Organization took on some of the organizing responsibilities. In their third year, the working group decided to apply the study circle model to address the issue of violence, a matter of growing concern in Lima. Still more community members joined the discussions at this stage. Today, a Study Circle Council meets regularly in the mayor's office to help coordinate the discussions, to report on their results, and to help connect the discussions to community-wide action. According to Mayor Berger, "Participants come out of these discussions fundamentally changed. This city will never be the same."

As part of the year-long Minneapolis Quality Schools Study in 1992-93, about 40 study circles formed to help citizens discuss major objectives for the city's schools. Associate Superintendent Carol Johnson notes that the study circles' impact went far beyond the Study's report by helping to upgrade the quality of debate and discussion surrounding the fall election of a new mayor and three new school board members. "Educational issues could have been polarizing, but because of the study circles and other aspects of the Minneapolis Quality Schools Study, no one was able to present the issues as simple sound bites. People knew, for example, that they were not faced with a choice between equity and excellence."

These and other large-scale discussion programs marked the beginning of what has become a centerpiece of our efforts at the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) to promote grassroots deliberation on public issues.

We are currently advising dozens of communities that are working to establish broad-based, democratic discussions. Each community is special, with its unique concerns, people, ways of working, assets, and needs. Inevitably, each community must find its own way to build dialogue and citizen involvement. There are, however, important precedents, principles, and lessons that can provide guidance along the way.

This guide summarizes what we have learned from hundreds and hundreds of visits, phone conversations, news articles, and more. Obviously, we cannot convey all the nuances of these lessons, but we have tried to distill the essence of a model that you can readily adapt to your own community.

Whether you are in the public, private, or nonprofit sector, or a single concerned citizen, you can begin to collaborate with others to apply the basic, hands-on

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lessons laid out in this guide. We hope that ***Planning Community-wide Study Circle Programs: A Step-by-Step Guide*** will be both inspirational and informational as you work to create broad-based democratic discussion of the critical issues your community is facing.

What are study circles?

Study circles are grounded historically in the U.S. town meeting tradition and in the study groups of the Chautauqua era at the turn of the century. Most simply, they are groups of 5 to 15 people who agree to meet several times — usually for 4 or 5 sessions — to grapple with a social or political issue in a democratic, nonpartisan, and collaborative way. Complex issues are broken down into manageable subdivisions, and controversial topics are dealt with in depth. Meeting for several sessions provides the opportunity to develop continuity and camaraderie. At the same time, setting a specific and limited number of sessions makes it possible for busy people to participate. Accessible reading material provides a common starting point for the discussions and helps group members consider a range of views.

Study circles are voluntary and highly participatory. They do not look to experts for the final word on an issue, but use expert opinion as one way to inform ideas and choices. All viewpoints are taken seriously and each participant has an equal opportunity to participate so that the group can capitalize on the unique wisdom and experience of all its members. The process — democratic discussion among equals — is as important as the content.

Study circles differ from typical public meetings in that they do not begin with specific desired outcomes. Also, study circles provide comfortable, open settings for everyone to explore public issues without the need to defend a position. People are invited to share their ideas, listen to one another, and learn together. In the process, they can better understand what the community as a whole is facing, and begin to explore ideas for what the community might do.

Because agreement is not an objective of the discussions, people are free to engage in dialogue rather than debate. This freedom allows them to explore the kinds of action they would like to take, knowing that they will not be pressured into agreeing to a particular conclusion or action step. Yet the democratic exploration of community concerns frequently leads to collaboration and action since people emerge from the study circle with an increased understanding of community concerns and assets, and with a new network of community contacts.

In the past, most study circles have taken place within single organizations. Churches, synagogues, and mosques; civic and community groups; businesses and unions; social service agencies; advocacy organizations; and schools, colleges, and universities have all used study circles to help their members and constituents consider vital issues. Recently, however, the growing desire to cross sectors in order to build community has led to a relatively new phenomenon — the community-wide study circle program.

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What are community-wide study circle programs?

Community-wide study circle programs are large-scale, broad-based discussion programs involving dozens of study circles. The organizational models for these programs vary, but the programs always involve extensive collaboration among community institutions for a common purpose: the involvement of ordinary citizens from all parts of the community in open discussions of a critical issue.

Community-wide study circle programs have addressed various issues, including race relations, violence, and education. They generally develop out of a powerful sense that "We've got to do something about this problem." This sense of urgency sometimes arises from a local crisis or an upcoming policy decision. In other cases, it comes from a growing feeling that the community is "stuck" in one place on an issue, or that an ongoing problem is eroding the community's well-being. In addition to great concern about a particular issue, many organizers of study circle programs hold a strong personal conviction that ***the community can truly address its concerns only when community members from all walks of life have real opportunities to hear each other and to work together democratically.***

As community-wide study circle programs bear the fruits of increased citizen involvement, they often evolve into successive "rounds" of discussions. Programs sometimes begin within a well-defined segment of the community (such as members of churches or neighborhood associations) and then expand to include other sectors of the community. Or, the success of discussions on one issue often causes the community to see the value of taking on another issue. By organizing successive rounds, the community can develop expertise along the way, give new sponsors and participants opportunities to become involved, and allow feedback from participants to shape the overall program.

What do communities gain from community-wide study circles?

Bringing the vision of broad-based democratic discussion to fruition requires organizational commitment and hard work. Yet program organizers find this work worthwhile because their efforts result in many meaningful gains for the community.

On the personal level:

- Study circle participants have the opportunity to develop their own views and to connect their experiences to public issues. This gives participants an opportunity to "take ownership" of an issue — an important first step in initiating or reinvigorating participation in public life.
- Participants explore not just their own beliefs, but the beliefs that others hold. They learn that they can disagree without being disagreeable or feeling threatened.
- Participants form new friendships and new community connections. "I never knew anyone on the other side of town. Now I have *friends* there," said one participant.
- Participants learn that they are not alone in wanting to address an issue, and often find allies for their work. Even when they decide to take

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individual action, they know that they are part of something bigger than themselves, and that they can make a difference.

For organizations that sponsor or organize the discussions:

- Study circles broaden sponsors' connections to the community. Organizations frequently find new board members and other volunteers from previously underrepresented segments of their city. They may also receive input so that they can better carry out their organizational goals.
- New working relationships with other organizations develop. In part, this happens as people from various organizations become acquainted with one another. It also comes from the collaborative nature of creating a study circle program: organizational leaders have the opportunity to explore common ground, and to examine their collective ability to inspire dialogue and increase public involvement.

Within the community as a whole:

- New approaches to solving community problems emerge as people better understand that their personal concerns cut across the entire community: How do we encourage our young people? How do we make sure that people can get decent jobs? How can we stem crime and violence?
- When the study circles are racially diverse, they help to bridge divisions of race and ethnicity and to establish strong, interracial networks for community problem solving.
- New relationships among individuals, among organizations, and between the public and community institutions strengthen the connections that give a community both strength and vitality.
- When a wide range of community institutions works together to create the study circle program, the study circles lead to new collaboration among community sectors.
- The study circles often result in action steps that include everything from new playgrounds, to increased volunteerism in current programs, to new large-scale programs designed to address community problems.

How does SCRC support community-wide discussion programs?

The Study Circles Resource Center first began promoting small-group discussion programs in January of 1990. SCRC is a project of the Topsfield Foundation, which has a long history of promoting grassroots participation in social and political issues. Support from the Foundation's endowment enables SCRC staff to provide free consultation via phone, fax, and mail. In addition, an SCRC staff member is occasionally able to visit community-wide study circle programs.

SCRC staff members work with community leaders at every stage of creating a community-wide study circle program, from sharing descriptions of various organizational models, to working through situations within a budding coalition, to advising on kickoff events, to writing letters of support for funding proposals.

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Sometimes, we can assist with on-site training; if other obligations do not permit that, we can often put you in touch with someone who can conduct an initial training event. SCRC also supports community-wide programs by providing discussion materials free of charge whenever possible.

We hope that ***Planning Community-wide Study Circle Programs: A Step-by-Step Guide*** will be another important part of our assistance. It will surely be an improvement over past scenarios, when organizers worked from hurried notes made during phone conversations with SCRC staff!

You will find in this resource some general guidelines for establishing community-wide discussion programs. We are very aware, however, that there are no hard-and-fast, one-size-fits-all rules. We strongly encourage you to call us, to tell us about your community and the goals for your program, and to share with us your plans and ideas. While bearing in mind the unique aspects of your efforts, we will do our best to share lessons learned from other programs around the country.

In talking with us and sharing your local program's stories, challenges, and successes, you will also aid in the evolution of this document. ***Planning Community-wide Study Circle Programs*** is a work in progress, a snapshot of our current understanding of best practices. Its flexible format is designed to allow updates and supplements as we continue to learn and to refine our advice. This learning and refinement can happen only through communication with people like you.

How is this document organized?

In this resource you will find the following sections:

Part 1, this introduction.

Part 2 contains the basic "how-to" information for organizing community-wide study circle programs. It begins with "A Summary of Basic Steps." The remainder of Part 2 elaborates on these steps.

Part 3 provides sample documents that you can adapt for your program.

Part 4 tells the stories of some community-wide study circle programs throughout the country.

Part 5 contains additional resources that will assist you in your planning.

Supplementary resources found in the pockets of this binder include SCRC's *The Study Circle Handbook* and *A Guide to Training Study Circle Leaders*. Other items that might be included, depending on the specifics of your program, are samples of SCRC's topical discussion programs, *Guidelines for Creating Effective Study Circle Material*, and *Study Circles in Paired Congregations: Enriching Your Community Through Shared Dialogue on Vital Issues*.

Please remember that this guide is just one aspect of SCRC's support for community-wide study circle programs. Call us so that we can assist you in developing your program. We also want to document your work so that others can learn from *your* innovations.

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Part 2

Basic Steps in Creating a Community-wide Program

A SUMMARY OF BASIC STEPS ____ 2-1

BUILDING A COALITION TO SPONSOR AND ORGANIZE THE DISCUSSIONS ____ 2-4
- Building a central working group ... 2-4
- Identifying potential sponsors ... 2-5
- Recruiting sponsors ... 2-6
- Holding pilot study circles ... 2-6
- Funding and staffing your program ... 2-7
- Possible budget items ... 2-8

SELECTING AND/OR WRITING DISCUSSION MATERIALS ____ 2-9

COORDINATING THE OVERALL STUDY CIRCLE PROGRAM ____ 2-11
- What needs to be done, and who will do it? Three general models ... 2-11
- Ensuring a mix of participants within individual study circles ... 2-12
- Selecting the sites ... 2-13
- Scheduling the study circles ... 2-14

RECRUITING AND TRAINING DISCUSSION LEADERS ____ 2-15
- Identifying and recruiting effective discussion leaders ... 2-15
- Who should train the leaders? ... 2-16
- What should happen during a training program? ... 2-16
- Ongoing support for discussion leaders ... 2-16

KICKOFF AND CELEBRATION EVENTS ____ 2-17

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS ____ 2-19

PUBLICIZING THE PROGRAM ____ 2-21
- Informal publicity ... 2-21
- Media coverage of study circles ... 2-21
- Media support and partnership in community-wide programs ... 2-22

INTEGRATING STUDY CIRCLES INTO COMMUNITY PROBLEM SOLVING ____ 2-23

MEASURING THE OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY-WIDE STUDY CIRCLE PROGRAMS ____ 2-26

A SUMMARY OF BASIC STEPS

The following outline provides basic steps for organizing a community-wide study circle program. Of course, actual programs never develop in such a tidy, linear fashion! You will sometimes find yourself going hard at several items simultaneously, while wrapping up previous steps and planning later ones.

1. ***Build a working group of community leaders*** who are committed to open community dialogue on an issue of common concern. By including people who approach the issue from different perspectives and experiences, you will help ensure a broad base of support for the study circles. *(See "Building a central working group" on page 2-4.)*

2. ***Hold a study circle among your working group.*** This will help solidify your collaboration and help your group come to a better understanding of the study circle process and the value of cross-sector dialogue. It will also help you finalize decisions about what discussion materials to use for your program. *(See "Selecting and/or Writing Discussion Materials" on page 2-9.)*

3. ***Decide how your working group will handle the overall coordination of the program.*** That is, decide who will recruit study circle participants and leaders, and how participants, leaders, and sites will be matched. Communities do this in various ways: in some, the working group "pools" participants and leaders, and then forms study circles that they assign to various sites around the community; in others, the sponsors take primary responsibility for forming the study circles, which remain closely tied to their organizations; in yet other communities, the working group "pairs" or "matches" the study circles that have been

Terminology

Each community organizes its study circles in a unique way, and has its own ways of referring to the different roles that organizations and people play. In this guide, we use the following terminology:

The handful of organizations and people who form the ***working group*** do the "heavy lifting" to make a community-wide study circle program happen. Frequently, one or two key people staff the program and provide overall coordination. Other members of the working group may train the leaders and provide ongoing training support for discussion leaders. To help reach into the broader community, the working group also recruits a larger group of ***sponsors***. (We will often refer to your working group and sponsors collectively as your ***coalition***.) In addition to lending their resources and credibility to the program, the sponsors in some communities recruit ***study circle organizers*** — the people who coordinate individual study circles. Depending on how you organize your program, they may be responsible for everything from arranging sites to recruiting discussion leaders and participants.

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organized by individual organizations. *(See "What needs to be done, and who will do it? Three general models" on page 2-11.)*

4. ***Identify and recruit sponsors*** who can lend their resources and credibility to the program. They will expand the power of the study circle coalition and help reach out into the whole community. *(See "Identifying potential sponsors" on page 2-5, and "Recruiting sponsors" on page 2-6.)* At this stage, some working groups hold "kickoff" events to recruit sponsoring organizations.

5. Once you have recruited sponsors, ***hold a few pilot study circles*** among coalition members, to help solidify the commitment of sponsors and to increase their understanding of the study circle process. Those who participate will gain an increased sense of ownership of the program, and will make a much more powerful call for dialogue to the community as a whole. The success of pilot study circles can gain visibility for the program and help win support from other community leaders and the community at large. Pilot study circles can also help to create a pool of potential discussion leaders. *(See "Holding pilot study circles" on page 2-6.)*

6. ***Assist sponsors*** if they are going to be recruiting study circle organizers from among their colleagues and constituents. One way to do this is to share a "pledge of participation," which will help potential organizers understand their role and make explicit their commitment to the program. *(See "What needs to be done, and who will do it? Three general models" on page 2-11 and the "Pledge of Participation for Study Circle Organizers" on page 3-10.)*

7. ***Recruit potential discussion leaders.*** Sometimes the working group takes primary responsibility for this, and sometimes sponsors are asked to help with recruitment. Whatever the case, when you look for leaders you won't need experts on the topic, but rather people who know how to help people listen and engage in constructive dialogue, and who are comfortable dealing with people of different backgrounds. *(See "Recruiting and Training Discussion Leaders" on page 2-15, "Tips for Recruiting Discussion Leaders" on page 3-11, and "Pledge of Participation for Study Circle Discussion Leaders" on page 3-12.)*

8. ***Hold a training session for the discussion leaders.*** A local college or university, or a human relations organization, might be able to organize this facet of the study circle program. Such organizations should be part of the central working group if they are going to provide ongoing support for discussion leaders. *(See "Recruiting and Training Discussion Leaders" on page 2-15, and the booklet entitled* A Guide to Training Study Circle Leaders, *enclosed with this guide.)*

9. ***Set a range of dates for the full-fledged program*** so that all of the study circles in the community will occur more or less within the same time frame.

10. ***Hold a "kickoff" event*** to broadcast the study circle program. This is an ideal way to generate media coverage and gain greater community

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visibility. Refer to what transpired in your pilot study circles, and state clearly how and why people should take part in the study circles. *(See "Kickoff and Celebration Events" on page 2-17, and "Publicizing the Program" on page 2-21.)*

11. ***Work with your study circle organizers as they recruit participants.*** *(See "Coordinating the Overall Study Circle Program" on page 2-11, and "Recruiting Participants" on page 2-19.)*
12. ***Let the study circles begin!***
13. During the study circles, ***be available to discussion leaders and study circle organizers.*** After the study circles have been meeting for a couple of sessions, convene the leaders and trainers so that they can share questions, challenges, and ideas with one another. Organizers may need your advice and assistance in working out scheduling, overflow, etc.
14. ***Hold a community function*** at the conclusion of the program. Use this event to inform participants about new and existing action opportunities. It can be a chance for people to reorganize themselves into action groups and new sets of study circles, or to report to officials and community leaders. It is also an important opportunity to celebrate the successes of the program! *(See "Kickoff and Celebration Events" on page 2-17.)*

Remember that the Study Circles Resource Center can provide assistance and advice as you plan and implement your program.

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BUILDING A COALITION TO SPONSOR AND ORGANIZE THE DISCUSSIONS

Establishing a coalition of community organizations that will sponsor and organize the discussions is the most important step in creating a community-wide study circle program. The coalition usually includes a small central ***working group*** that takes responsibility for the overall program, and a larger group of ***sponsors*** that provides resources, credibility, and connections to participants.

Check out these sample documents:

- ✓ "Community Survey" on page 3-3
- ✓ "Letter of Invitation to Potential Sponsors" on page 3-6
- ✓ "Pledge of Participation for Sponsors" on page 3-7

Keep in mind the vision of what you are creating: a strong, diverse coalition dedicated to citizen dialogue and involvement. If you strive to know your community and to build a broad coalition that represents many sectors, voices, points of view, concerns, and experiences, your study circle program will have tremendous vitality and appeal in the community.

This kind of coalition-building requires unique leadership, a working knowledge of community dynamics, and a willingness to learn as you go. For example, you will likely have to work through the turf and ownership issues, mistrust, and genuine disagreements that are part of any collaboration. Because study circles do not promote one particular point of view or try to persuade people to take a particular action step, potential coalition partners can usually find ways to work through these tensions. After all, the partners do not have to agree on an exact definition of the problem, or on specific solutions — they must agree only on the importance of citizen involvement and dialogue in addressing the issue. In fact, as potential coalition partners come together for the express purpose of promoting grassroots dialogue, they themselves often have their first real opportunity to engage in open, honest, cross-sector dialogue.

As you recruit program sponsors, you may encounter reservations about the benefits of public dialogue and involvement. Even though many organizations believe that public involvement is important, most have had little tangible experience in creating opportunities for that involvement. Part of your job, then, will be to help people understand that broad-based dialogue is an important and doable way to address a community concern and to achieve their organizational goals. *(See "What do communities gain from community-wide study circles?" on page 1-3, and "Measuring the Outcomes of Community-wide Study Circle Programs" on page 2-26.)*

Building a central working group

There are two general approaches to building a central working group. In some communities, organizations with a history of working together decide to carry

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their collaboration into creating a study circle program. There are obvious advantages to such an approach: people already know one another, feel comfortable working together, and have the blessing of their sponsoring organizations for their collaborative work.

In other communities, there is an intentional effort to build a working group of "unlikely partners" — that is, of organizations that approach the issue from quite different experiences and perspectives. While the establishment of this kind of working group may take longer than the first approach, it can yield great rewards. In some cases, the call for dialogue will be credible to the larger community only if all the important (and different) community leaders are making the call together.

Whichever way you form your working group, share the proposed discussion materials early on and hold a study circle among yourselves. Such a pilot provides a valuable opportunity to get to know one another in new ways, to discover ways to work together, and to gain understanding of the value of study circles for the general community.

Identifying potential sponsors

As your working group begins to consider the larger group of program sponsors, think broadly. Think of the various sectors of the community, and of the organizations and agencies that could help carry study circles into these sectors. It is important to realize that no one can know all the institutions and people that are already working on an issue, or that would like to be involved. So, even if you have been working on this issue in your community for a very long time, take some time to explore the range of groups in the community and to ask whether they would like to become involved in the study circle program. *(See page 3-4 for a long list of possible sponsors.)*

A simple survey of the agencies and organizations around your community will help you better understand "the lay of the land" — especially if you ask respondents to provide contact information for other organizations you should know about. *(For a model of an informal survey, see "Community Survey" on page 3-3.)* This survey can help you avoid, or at least minimize, the need to approach someone at a later date to say, "We're sorry. We know now that you should have been invited to join us at the start of our program. Would you join us now?"

In thinking about potential sponsors, remember that your program's scope depends on the ***grassroots outreach potential*** of your sponsors. What organizations can and will make the commitment to signing up participants? Some of the organizations and institutions which regularly come into contact with large numbers of people include churches, membership organizations, senior centers, businesses, educational institutions, and government agencies. Who has "the ear" of varying segments of your community? Think in terms of your community's variety of racial and ethnic groups, economic levels, occupations, and political views, and don't forget to include new arrivals in your community.

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Who has ***visibility and credibility*** in your community? After thinking in terms of the different parts of your community, think of who can effectively speak to the entire community to make the plea for dialogue. Is it a public official or "city hall"? A group of community leaders? A widely respected civic organization? A newspaper or other media organization? *(See "Media support and partnership in community-wide programs" on page 2-22.)*

Who has the ***resources*** to help pull the program together? Staff time for organizing your program is a critical need, and the organization(s) devoting the most staff time should obviously be part of your working group. Another resource, expertise for your discussion leader training, is probably available in your community.

An important note: Many communities have started out small. That is, rather than take on every community sector in the first study circle round, the working group has recruited sponsors from one particular sector — say, from religious congregations throughout the city, or from high schools or neighborhood associations. Then, in successive rounds, it has reached out to a wider group of potential sponsors. This incremental approach allows the working group to gradually build support for the study circles and to learn as it works toward broad sponsorship.

Recruiting sponsors

After identifying potential sponsors, you can start recruiting them to support the study circle program in various ways. Share discussion materials with potential sponsors early on, to give them a clear idea of what the study circles will entail. Individual members of the working group might talk with potential sponsors one-on-one, either through visits or phone calls.

To follow up on these conversations, you might hold a strategizing meeting between the working group and potential sponsors. At this meeting, you can explain the study circle idea, lay out your plans, solicit feedback, and brainstorm on next steps. Such a meeting also provides a setting in which the broader coalition can begin working together.

In some communities, once the working group has identified potential sponsors, it plans a large community event to which potential sponsors are invited. There, the working group makes a broad public call for community sponsorship of the study circles, and asks for commitments from potential sponsors. Some of these events receive substantial media coverage and help publicize the study circles to the general public.

Whether you decide to hold a less formal working meeting, or a more formal "kickoff" event, a "pledge of participation" for sponsors will help you clarify plans. *(See "Pledge of Participation for Sponsors" on page 3-7.)*

Holding pilot study circles

In many communities, the coalition (the working group and sponsors) holds "pilot" study circles at this stage of the planning. Some communities devote months to this stage. The pilots help solidify coalition members' commitment by

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allowing them to experience first-hand the value of really listening to different viewpoints, of clarifying their own thinking, and of working with others to find new ideas for addressing the issue.

Pilot study circles also enable sponsors to be more credible spokespersons for the study circles. In some cases, sponsors who have participated in the pilot discussions have been so convinced of study circles' value that they have asked to join the central working group! Pilot study circles can also provide a pool of potential discussion leaders for the full-fledged program.

Funding and staffing your program

The success of a community-wide program generally depends on its being adopted by an organization which sees promoting public dialogue as an integral part of its mission. This key organization — one of the central working group members — acts as the overall coordinator of the program and as a central hub for communication among coalition members and throughout the whole community. Organizations which have played this role include mayor's offices, city councils, interfaith or ecumenical organizations, YWCAs, National Conference affiliates, and human relations commissions.

In some cases, this coordinating organization is able to incorporate the study circle work into its budget. In other cases, outside funding may be required to hire study circle staff, or to support the dedication of existing staff to the study circle program. Increasingly, study circle programs are receiving funding from community foundations, the United Way, local corporations, and local government. SCRC staff can assist with your fundraising by providing letters of support which outline our in-kind services and help potential funders understand the broader context of your efforts.

Whether you are seeking outside funding or are integrating study circles into your organization's budget, the list on the following page represents the basic kinds of expenditures and "in-kind" contributions you may want to include in your budget. (Including in-kind contributions will give you a much more realistic view of the actual cost of your program.)

We are not including figures, since they vary so much from program to program, but sample budgets developed by various communities are available from SCRC. Please note that we are not suggesting that you include every item listed here in your program, but rather offer these items as suggestions for what you might include.

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Possible budget items

Promotion (including design costs)
- Major mailings
  - Stationery
  - Printing/photocopying
  - Postage
  - Posters/flyers
  - Newspaper advertisements

Kickoff and celebration events
- Food/refreshments
- Room rental
- Decorations
- Honoraria for speakers

Meetings with sponsors
- Refreshments

Staff (including benefits, often calculated at 15%)
- Program coordinator
- Discussion leader training and support
- Support staff
- Volunteers (listed as in-kind)

Office expenses
- Telephone
- Postage (possibly including the expense of mailing materials to facilitators and/or participants)
- Photocopying

Discussion leaders
- Training
  - Materials *
  - Room rental
  - Meals or refreshments
  - Honorarium for a trainer
  - Travel and lodging expenses for trainer (if from out of town)
- Volunteer hours (usually in-kind, though some communities pay small stipends)
- Travel expenses
- Child care

Discussion materials for participants *

* For community-wide study circle programs, SCRC provides free copies of its materials. (For exceptionally large programs, we provide our materials at cost.)

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SELECTING AND/OR WRITING DISCUSSION MATERIALS

Constructive dialogue on a public issue requires a basic understanding of the discussion process and some shared knowledge about the issue. Good discussion material helps to convey these basics.

The material should give study circle participants a clear idea of how the sessions will progress, what the discussions will cover, and what is expected of them. The materials should also help leaders provide focus and structure for each session and for the overall program.

In addition, good material helps convey the essence of study circles to groups and individuals who show interest in participating in the program. For this reason, the working group often shares discussion material as a first step in recruiting other working group members or in recruiting sponsors for the program.

The materials you share with sponsors, discussion leaders, and participants — usually reading materials, sometimes augmented by videotapes — should provide these critical elements:

- ***Basic information about the study circle process.*** *The Study Circle Handbook*, enclosed with this guide, includes two sections that you might photocopy for participants: "What is a study circle?" and "The role of the participant."
- ***Some basic information about the issue being discussed.*** Even though expertise is not a goal of the study circles, a common baseline of information provides a solid starting place for the discussions.
- ***Structure and continuity for several sessions of discussion.*** SCRC materials usually lay out a progression of sessions roughly along the following lines:

  Session 1: Introduction to the study circle process, sharing of personal experiences and concerns about the issue;

  Session 2: A range of views on the issue (with questions to help people explore a variety of views);

  Session 3: What are some ways to address the issue? (perhaps looking at how other communities have handled the same or a similar issue);

  Session 4: What can we do in this community?

  This progression has worked well on many issues in many communities. Of course, different issues may lend themselves to different formats. For example, you will want to incorporate national public policy into the discussions when it is particularly pertinent. In some communities, a definition of the problem itself may be a hot topic for discussion, in which case a session on "What are we facing here?" may be useful.
- ***Discussion questions for each session.*** These help focus participants' and leaders' thinking.

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- ***An opportunity to talk about personal concerns, experiences, and perceptions related to the issue.*** As noted above, this is often the focus for the entire first session of the study circle. This gives people a chance to understand the variety of experiences that exist in the community. This type of discussion also encourages people to see the connection between their personal experiences and the views they hold, and to appreciate how others' experiences might lead to different views.
- ***A fair, balanced presentation of a range of views on the issue.*** Presenting a range of views helps ensure that all group members know they have a "place at the table." The material should also help people see the strengths and weaknesses of each view, and thus help them to thoughtfully explore each one. The discussion leader should be careful to present the range of views as a starting point for discussion, not as a list from which people must choose.
- ***An opportunity to talk about possible action steps.*** This is usually the focus of the last session of the study circle. Even though coming to agreement about action is not the goal of the study circle, people need the chance to think together about the kinds of steps they — as individuals, or as members of other groups — might take after the discussions. This helps people use the discussions as a step toward making a difference in the community.

SCRC has developed several discussion guides specifically for community-wide discussion programs. (*See the resource list at the end of this guide.)* We can also recommend materials from our clearinghouse list of discussion materials produced by a variety of other publishers. If you decide to tackle a national policy issue, for example, you should look into the discussion guides developed by the Kettering Foundation's National Issues Forums. *(Call 800-433-7834 for more information on NIF, or 800-338-3987 to order their issue books.)*

No package of discussion materials should be taken as the last word on how to discuss a topic. Whenever you see fit, you should customize discussion materials for your community. Holding pilot discussions gives sponsors the opportunity to recommend ways to augment the materials. You might, for example, add discussion sessions that address aspects of the issue that are unique to your area, such as pending ordinances or legislation. Local news clippings are a good way to interject your community's unique history with the issue. In Yarmouth, Maine, sponsoring organizations submitted information on the town budget, which the working group then synthesized into readable discussion materials.

In rare instances, organizers of community-wide study circle programs may decide they need to develop completely original discussion material. This is a major undertaking, but one in which SCRC can lend advice. Our *Guidelines for Creating Effective Study Circle Material* provides a solid starting point.

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COORDINATING THE OVERALL STUDY CIRCLE PROGRAM

Coordination of the study circles requires an overall plan for how participants, discussion leaders, and discussion sites will be matched. It also requires a clear understanding of who is taking the responsibility for the various aspects of the plan. More an art than a science, this is the "nitty-gritty" work of grassroots public deliberation which is so time-consuming and yet so critical to success. In this section, you will see that there are many ways of handling this. We share these ideas as a way to help you and your working group think through program logistics.

Check out these sample documents:

- ✓ "Pledge of Participation for Study Circle Organizers" on page 3-10
- ✓ "Tips for Recruiting Discussion Leaders" on page 3-11
- ✓ "Pledge of Participation for Study Circle Discussion Leaders" on page 3-12
- ✓ "Study Circle Record Sheet" on page 3-17

What needs to be done, and who will do it? Three general models

No matter how you decide to handle the overall coordination, you will need to give attention to detail and be able to respond quickly to last-minute problems. As mentioned previously, one organization within the working group usually staffs the overall coordination of the program.

There are three basic models for coordinating the "who, when, and where?" details of the study circles. Each model entails a different distribution of the workload and will have different implications for the program as a whole. Your decision on which to use will depend upon what you hope to achieve with the study circles, on the needs of your community with regard to the issue you are addressing, and on available staff time.

Keep in mind that these models are very adaptable. Some communities combine various aspects of these approaches.

Model 1: The working group recruits participants from the general public and also recruits discussion leaders. It then takes the responsibility for forming study circles. This is done by grouping participants (often by time availability or in a way that makes each group diverse), matching leaders to those groups, and assigning the groups to sites around the community. This entails heavy organizing responsibilities for the working group. In this model, the working group relies on sponsors primarily for publicity and credibility, and perhaps for helping to recruit participants.

Model 2: The working group recruits sponsors, who in turn recruit study circle organizers from their organizations. These individual organizers then recruit discussion leaders, recruit participants (sometimes from the general public, but often from their own organization's members or constituents), and set up meeting sites and dates. These individual organizers report back to

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the key coordinator in the working group, who then helps with organizational details. However, the working group has less responsibility than in Model 1.

Model 3: This is a version of the second model. Once the individual organizers have recruited groups of participants and discussion leaders (as in Model 2), the working group then "pairs" or "matches" various groups with each other. In this way, some of the initial organizing work is handled by sponsors. With the more intentional mix of affiliations within each study circle, the working group can ensure diversity. Often, discussion leaders from each pairing (one from each organization) act as co-facilitators. The two organizations may alternate in hosting the study circle meetings.

Following are some questions to help you think about the various tasks and who will handle them:

- ***Who will recruit the discussion leaders?*** If the working group will be responsible for finding discussion leaders, you may want to recruit from one or two pools of people who have some kind of group facilitation experience. Advantages to this approach include the fact that the training may not need to be as rigorous as when inexperienced leaders are recruited. If you are asking sponsors to recruit discussion leaders, you will need to give them clear guidelines. *(See "Tips for Recruiting Discussion Leaders" on page 3-11.)*
- ***Who will recruit study circle participants?*** Will the working group make a call for dialogue to the general public and provide a way to sign up for study circles, as in Model 1? Or, will your sponsors (through their organizers) recruit participants primarily from their organizations, as in Models 2 and 3?
- ***Who will find the meeting sites?*** If you are asking your sponsors to take on this particular aspect of organizing, you may want to provide pointers on what makes a suitable site. *(See "Selecting the sites" on page 2-13.)*
- ***Who will match groups of participants, discussion leaders, and sites?*** Will you "pool" all participants and leaders and then assign them to groups and sites, as in Model 1? Or will you ask each sponsoring organization to recruit its own participants and leaders, and then have them stay in that particular grouping, as in Model 2? Or, will you — the working group — ask each organization to set up groups which you will then pair or match up, as in Model 3?

Ensuring a mix of participants within individual study circles

Diversity is a critical component of study circles. Indeed, one of the most important elements of any community-wide study circle program is the opportunity for participants to talk with others in the community that they don't often have a chance to meet or hear from. While the importance of different types of diversity will vary with the issue you are considering, ***racial and ethnic diversity*** in the groups will be critical in many communities.

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Some other kinds of diversity to consider include:

Age — A mix of generations always adds vitality and new perspectives to the discussions. It is particularly important when discussions center on youth issues.

Life experience and working background — For example, on the issue of education, study circle organizers often aim for a mix of parents, teachers, administrators, and members of the community whose ties to schools are less direct. On the issue of violence, some communities include neighborhood police officers in the discussions, as well as people from social service agencies who work on various aspects of violence.

Economic situation — On almost any issue, people with different incomes or in different economic situations will see an issue from unique perspectives.

Political perspectives — In some communities, talking across the lines of political division may be the most challenging and rewarding.

Some organizing schemes lend themselves more readily to establishing diversity within individual groups. It is particularly easy to establish diverse groups when the overall program organizer matches up groups of participants recruited by various organizations. Congregation pairing is an example: a white church and a black church can be paired to create racially diverse study circles. In another case, you might match participants recruited from a government agency with those from a private employer. Perhaps you'll match up a youth group and a senior center, or two different neighborhood organizations.

A different approach would be to give each individual organizer the responsibility for recruiting a diverse group of participants. Some organizers will have no difficulty doing this, or will rise to the challenge. In the words of one program coordinator, "People who work with you to organize individual study circles understand that it's important to have diverse groups. Encourage them to do it right, and they will usually come through for you." You can plan to match up those few organizers who are unable to recruit a diverse group of participants.

Creating diversity within each group is especially challenging when the working group takes responsibility for forming each study circle. The key coordinator must pool all the participants and then decide how to group them so that each study circle represents a desirable mix. Of course, this requires that you gather appropriate demographic information for each participant. Considering that you have to take into account the times that people are available and how far you can ask them to travel, this approach can become difficult and time-consuming. For this reason, we generally recommend one of the other options for most of your study circles.

Selecting the sites

Unless participants in a study circle already know one another (and they usually don't), public meeting rooms should be chosen over living rooms. Possible sites include meeting rooms in libraries, church halls, and community centers; community rooms in banks and other businesses; sponsoring organizations'

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conference rooms; firehouses; schools; union halls; police departments; and social service agencies.

These types of sites will generally offer wheelchair accessibility and adequate parking, but it's worth double checking. You can easily accommodate people with hearing loss by arranging some of your meetings in libraries or other public buildings in which assistive listening devices (ALDs) are readily available. Advertising the availability of these devices may help in recruiting participants.

Scheduling the study circles

Set a range of dates for your study circles so that all of the study circles in the community will occur more or less within the same time frame. This will help you promote the idea that your program is a true community-wide effort, not just isolated conversations among small groups of people.

Try to offer a variety of meeting times. A study circle or two that meets at breakfast, several brown-bag lunchtime groups, and a Saturday group, in addition to the usual mix of weeknight options, will increase your chances of attracting a wide variety of participants. Early evening study circles, perhaps with food and child care provided, make participation more workable for many community members.

Even if your study circle organizers handle most of their own recruits, they may need your help to find slots in other study circles for a few people with scheduling problems.

Last words

- Do not add new participants to study circles that have already had their initial meeting. Doing so can harm the group identity and the high level of comfort and camaraderie that tends to develop in the early stages of a study circle. If possible, organize new study circles for the late-comers.
- Lots of people have established study circles without the help of a computer, but nearly all of them wish they had done otherwise. Even a simple database of names, addresses, and phone numbers can be a real time-saver in the long run. Your list will be even more valuable if you code each person's role in the program, indicate which study circle they belong to, and insert memo notations to remind yourself of conversations, promises, etc. *(See "Study Circle Record Sheet" on page 3-17 for a sample data collection form.)*

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RECRUITING AND TRAINING DISCUSSION LEADERS

Skilled discussion leaders — sometimes referred to as "facilitators" — are absolutely critical to the success of the study circles. You will need people who care deeply about their community and the issues facing our society, and who want to help others engage in open, democratic discussions about those issues. They need not be experts, but should understand the range of community members' concerns and perspectives.

Check out these sample documents:

- ✓ "Tips for Recruiting Discussion Leaders" on page 3-11
- ✓ "Pledge of Participation for Study Circle Discussion Leaders" on page 3-12

Part of the challenge in identifying potential study circle leaders lies in the fact that our society does not typically cultivate or reward these qualities. Thus, "Where do we find potential discussion leaders, and how do we prepare them for the role?" are common questions from study circle organizers.

Identifying and recruiting effective discussion leaders

One good way to find potential study circle leaders is to seek out those people in the community who have some kind of experience in group facilitation, including conflict resolution, mediation, or total quality management. With little additional training, they can apply their skills to the study circle process. To locate these people, contact your local university's community services or adult education program, the university's conflict resolution program, your community mediation or dispute settlement center, the Cooperative Extension Service, or your community's human relations commission.

Another highly recommended approach to finding discussion leaders is to recruit them from the organizations involved in your study circle program. You can ask people from each of your sponsoring organizations to help you identify individuals who have experience in leading meetings, or who in some other way have shown that they have the qualities you seek: good listening skills, the ability to put people at ease in a conversation, respect for all views, and the ability to exhibit leadership without dominating. *(See "Tips for Recruiting Discussion Leaders" on page 3-11.)* The people you recruit in this manner will require a substantial training program since most will not have had previous training in group facilitation. However, this training can greatly expand the overall leadership pool in your community.

A third method, one which we do not generally recommend, involves making a general call for volunteer facilitators and then training anyone who signs up. This approach can result in the unpleasant task of having to "fire" a few volunteers, since you are apt to recognize during your training a couple of people who want to promote their own ideas rather than foster open dialogue. If you find you must broadcast a call for volunteers, try to filter inquiries by carefully explaining that the facilitators will talk less than anyone else in their groups, and that their views must remain unstated. Then, give people the opportunity to opt for the role of participant rather than discussion leader.

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Who should train the leaders?

Now that you have a carefully selected group of people willing to serve as discussion leaders, you will need top-notch people to help train them.

There are many able trainers in most communities. Organizations which provide instruction in group facilitation can readily adapt their techniques to the study circle process. Successful trainers of study circle discussion leaders have come from interfaith networks, human relations commissions, social service agencies, and university departments of adult and continuing education. Often these organizations have played a key role in the central working group for the overall study circle program.

When a local organization trains study circle leaders, the benefits include lower cost, ongoing support for the trainees, and more community ownership of the program. Some organizers, however, are more comfortable bringing in a trainer from outside the community for the initial training. If you take this approach, be sure to line up local people to work with this person in order to develop your local expertise.

At times, SCRC can provide a staff person to assist with an initial training. If this is not possible, we can often recommend consultants who have effectively trained study circle leaders in a wide variety of organizations and communities. However you decide to handle your training, SCRC's free consultation includes helping you design a leader training session to suit the leaders you have recruited and the goals of your study circle program.

What should happen during a training program?

The single most important aspect of any leadership training is the opportunity to experience a study circle. By allowing several hours for this aspect of your training, your novice facilitators can work through several discussion sessions, take turns practicing leadership, receive feedback from the trainer, and critique and encourage each other.

There is more to a training than the practice study circle, of course, and SCRC's *A Guide to Training Study Circle Leaders* (enclosed with this guide) answers most questions about conducting a training program.

Ongoing support for discussion leaders

During your training you should inform the discussion leaders about the kinds of ongoing support that will be available. For example, give them the phone number of the person who conducted the training, or someone in the working group, along with an invitation to call if they have any difficulties in their study circles.

It's also a good idea to hold a follow-up to your training at the midpoint of the study circles. This will give your discussion leaders the opportunity to discuss successes as well as problems. Ideally, your trainer should be there as a resource person, but you will probably find the leaders offering one another suggestions on ways to handle any difficulties that their peers have encountered.

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KICKOFF AND CELEBRATION EVENTS

Kickoff and celebration events provide an opportunity for you to build momentum for your program and to mark milestones in its development. If your program evolves into several rounds of study circles, you may have an ongoing cycle of these events as you expand to different topics, different sponsors, or wider participation.

Planning these events requires the same skill and flexibility involved in planning any large-scale community affair. Below are some ideas that have helped inaugurate or wrap up various community-wide study circle programs.

Check out these sample documents:

- ✓ "Letter of Invitation to Potential Sponsors" on page 3-6
- ✓ "Press Release for Kickoff Event" on page 3-8
- ✓ "Now That We've Talked... Ideas for Community Involvement" on page 3-18
- ✓ "After the Study Circle... I'd Like to Stay Involved!" on page 3-20

General suggestions

- Consider connecting your event to holidays or local events. Martin Luther King Day, for example, has been especially suitable for launching or concluding discussions of race relations. In some communities, a declared "Week Without Violence" provides visibility to the issue as you launch or conclude community discussions.
- Be sure to invite the media! *(See "Media coverage of study circles" on page 2-21, and "Press Release for Kickoff Event" on page 3-8.)* Your press releases should help editors and reporters understand the "angle" of your story. You might want to mention, for example, that your local efforts are part of a much larger movement.
- Have study circle discussion leaders or participants talk about their experience. (For kickoff events, this is another good reason to conduct pilot study circles.) Using this approach you can easily arrange an agenda which features the perspectives of public officials, community leaders from a variety of sectors, and ordinary community members.
- These events are sometimes working sessions in which people talk about next steps for dialogue and/or action. This might require break-out groups at the larger event.
- Invite your program's sponsors to share information on themselves and their activities. This could be as simple as setting up a table for brochures, or you could invite organizations to set up their own exhibit tables.

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Suggestions for kickoff events

- If bringing people on board is the main goal, be sure that people do not leave without having a chance to make a commitment to participate. Be sure to make sign-up sheets readily available.
- Your event can be an opportunity to educate people on the issue to be discussed in study circles. For example, victims of violence and professionals who deal with violence can help people understand how it affects the community.

Suggestions for celebration events

- Ask representatives from study circles to report on their discussions and on any action steps that have emerged. You may want to use these summaries to design a written program report for the community at large.
- If you didn't do it in your study circles, distribute a questionnaire asking participants how they would like to become involved in addressing the issue discussed in the study circles. *(See "After the Study Circle ... I'd Like to Stay Involved!" on page 3-20.)*
- Do something to build on the community spirit that has come out of the study circles. People who participated in the first major round of study circles in Lima, Ohio, staged a picnic celebration that included family and friends. Their Labor Day parade even featured a study circle float!
- Ask study circle participants to announce action groups or committees that they would like to help organize. Arrange for sign-up sheets or other ways for people to join these groups.
- Ask sponsoring organizations to announce groups or efforts they would like citizens to be involved in. For example, a police department might invite people to join a new advisory board or an existing neighborhood watch program.

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RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

Community-wide study circle programs are based on the belief that ordinary people have both the ability and the authority to deal with difficult issues. But how do you attract people who don't consider themselves "civic minded"?

Check out these sample documents:

- ✓ "Study Circle Program Description" on page 3-1
- ✓ "Letter of Invitation for Participants" on page 3-14
- ✓ "Pledge of Participation for Participants" on page 3-15

And how do you make sure that the people who come to your study circles are broadly representative of the community? Study circles, after all, are about grappling with various points of view. Your program can provide a rare opportunity for people to hear the personal experiences and honest views of people different from themselves — different in terms of race and ethnicity, occupation, age, physical ability, political viewpoint, religious affiliation, and more. *(Some considerations of diversity were covered in "Ensuring a mix of participants within individual study circles" on page 2-12.)*

Following are some recommendations gleaned from successful programs around the country.

Start with a strong coalition

You will depend on your coalition to recruit participants for your program. Individuals will feel welcome if your coalition includes the organizations they relate to and respect, so think broadly in terms of potential coalition members. Have you considered organizations of seniors? youth groups? literacy organizations? unions? major employers? civil rights organizations and minority associations? tenants' associations? interfaith organizations and ministerial associations? *(See "Identifying potential sponsors" on page 2-5, and "Community Survey" on page 3-3.)*

Seek out a broad-based institution to help you establish ties with sectors of the community that are outside the working group's network. In some places, a public official has the credibility required to initiate new bonds in the community. In other places, it may be the local human relations organization, an interfaith organization, the newspaper, or the YWCA.

If you have media support for your program, or if your coalition includes media partners, your ability to reach out to the broader community will be greatly enhanced. Newspaper articles and ads, as well as radio and TV public service announcements (PSAs), will get the whole community talking about your program.

Much of the success of the study circle program lies in shared ownership. When people recruit for a program they know is truly theirs, they will be more

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persuasive. In turn, they will pass on that spirit of ownership to study circle participants.

Work with the people who will sign up individual participants

Stress the importance of *personal* invitations. An announcement is nice, a letter is better, and a note with a follow-up call is most likely to get results! People lead busy lives, and are drawn to participate in those activities where someone they know personally emphasizes the importance of their participation.

Make sure that those who are recruiting participants are well informed about the program. Ideally they will have participated in pilot discussions. They should at least have a copy of the materials that will be used for the discussions. You will want them to have an overall sense of the organizational structure of the program so they can convey the fact that participants will be part of something that is truly community-wide. *(See page 3-1 for a "Study Circle Program Description" suitable for sharing with the people who recruit participants.)*

Encourage your study circle organizers to tell potential participants that your program is trying to build bridges among all parts of the community. Make it clear that no person will be expected to represent all Hispanic Americans, or all Republicans, or all senior citizens. But also explain that having participants from a variety of backgrounds will bring in experiences and perspectives that otherwise would not be present.

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PUBLICIZING THE PROGRAM

Publicity for community-wide study circle programs comes in many forms, ranging from informal notices to full-blown media partnership.

Informal publicity

Encourage your coalition members to take responsibility for publicizing the study circle program. Articles and notices in company and union newsletters, church bulletins, and organizational newsletters will help spread the word about the study circles and add credibility. You can increase the likelihood that sponsors will take part in this kind of promotion — and help ensure accuracy — by providing complete, usable text in several different lengths.

Check out this sample document:

✓ "Press Release for Kickoff Event" on page 3-8

Media coverage of study circles

If you are new to media work, it's important to realize that you don't need special training or experience to effectively promote your story. What you do need is the readily available information on basic methods for communicating with the media. You can find this information in books, in "how-to" guides published by nonprofit organizations, or in SCRC's *Study Circles in the News: Approaching the Media with Your Study Circle Story. (See the resource list at the end of this guide for ordering information.)*

There is growing media coverage of community-wide study circle programs. Particularly when the issue touches many people in the community, journalists see great value in covering the story. SCRC has a rapidly growing collection of newspaper articles on study circle programs. *(Call if you would like some samples in addition to those starting on page 5-13 of this guide.)*

Kickoff or celebration events provide especially good opportunities for media coverage. In some cases, a newspaper reporter will ask to sit in on a study circle. If this happens:

1. Make sure that someone from the working group talks with the reporter prior to the study circle to convey a sense of the overall program.
2. Set clear ground rules for the reporter. One common ground rule is that the reporter not attribute comments to particular participants without their explicit permission.
3. Identify the visitor as a reporter at the beginning of the meeting, inform participants of the special ground rules, and ask for their consent to this arrangement.

Television coverage of an actual study circle can be more problematic since it is impossible to promise confidentiality. However, television has been used

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creatively and effectively in many community-wide programs. In Louisville, Kentucky, for example, the Faith Channel supported the study circles by broadcasting ongoing interviews with the working group. In addition, the station frequently aired well edited segments of study circles (among participants recruited expressly for this purpose) to promote the study circle program among churches.

In another example, the Warner Cable Company in Lima, Ohio, produced a short, interesting video that showed brief clips of study circles. It primarily featured interviews with program organizers, discussion leaders, and participants. Since people told why the experience was a powerful one for them, the video became one of the working group's primary tools for recruiting additional sponsors. It also became one of SCRC's main tools for explaining the value of community-wide programs, and has led to support from cable companies in other communities.

Media support and partnership in community-wide programs

In a growing number of communities, media institutions are key players in community-wide study circle programs. The "public journalism" or "community journalism" movement has bolstered this trend.

Strong media support takes two basic forms:

Full partnership in the working group. In most of these cases, the local newspaper develops and publishes the discussion materials, and prints extra copies to be distributed to study circle participants. The newspaper uses its journalistic expertise to lay out even-handed, accessible readings, and also uses newspaper space to encourage citizen involvement and participation. Since the discussions are geared not to agreement, but to broad-based community involvement, a growing number of papers see this as a viable way to fill an important public responsibility.

Sponsorship of the program. Newspapers, radio stations, and television stations in various communities have committed themselves to publicizing the study circles, explaining their value to the community (through editorial coverage), and providing prominent coverage. With public service announcements, radio and television have helped to broadcast the appeal for study circle participants.

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INTEGRATING STUDY CIRCLES INTO COMMUNITY PROBLEM SOLVING

A large-scale study circle program can change the way a community deals with its problems. In the short term, citizens and the community as a whole become more capable of dealing effectively with a specific problem. In the long run, local people and institutions can work together to build a community that is capable of solving all kinds of problems.

Check out these sample documents:

- ✓ "Now That We've Talked... Ideas for Community Involvement" on page 3-18
- ✓ "After the Study Circle... I'd Like to Stay Involved!" on page 3-20

The degree of change in your community will depend, in part, on the continuation of study circles as a means to bring community members into community conversations. It will also depend on the degree to which you include mechanisms to help connect the study circles to opportunities for action in the larger community.

Individuals and action steps

Most people know that they can volunteer in their community, and in fact many people do. Still, many question whether their service will really make a difference. Even people who give much to the community may sense that they have no real voice in dealing with the roots of the problem they are trying to address.

Study circles can strengthen community service. When people have a chance to talk and work with others on an issue, they begin to feel that they aren't alone, that their neighbors support and appreciate their work.

As an organizer of a community-wide study circle program, you can help to maximize the potential of the new volunteers who will emerge from the study circles. Along with the discussion material, provide as much information as possible on how people can channel their efforts after their study circle. SCRC discussion guides include suggestions for action, but it will be much more valuable to have information that is community-specific. *(See "Now That We've Talked... Ideas for Community Involvement" on page 3-18, and "After the Study Circle... I'd Like to Stay Involved!" on page 3-20.)*

As you prepare this information, enlist the help of public officials, reporters, and local experts on the issue. They can provide basic information on how the issue has impacted the community, what local government is doing about it, what service organizations and nonprofits are doing, and — most importantly — what volunteers can do to help.

When you approach community organizations that deal directly with problems or provide actual services — such as schools, police departments, government agencies, and housing nonprofits — ask them not only for information on how volunteers can help them, but on how community members can provide input to

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their organizations. In this way you can set up a two-way relationship between community members and the organizations that serve them: the organizations open up more to input from the community, while community members provide the organizations with more support and resources.

Small groups of active, engaged community members

As study circle participants share personal experiences, find common ground, come up with new ideas, and talk about what can be done, they often move quite naturally toward cooperation and action. This is especially true if the participants are a mix of people who are likely to approach a single problem from different vantage points — police officers and neighborhood residents, for example, or parents, teachers, and local businesspeople.

You can facilitate the spread of grassroots solutions to community problems by giving people the opportunity to form new, more action-focused groups. Of course, no one should be pressured to take a particular action or to become part of an action group. But, by providing opportunities, people will be more likely to find ways that they can act on their new-found knowledge and collaboration. To help with this, you can:

- Encourage interested group members to form a "discussion-to-action" group after the study circle.
- Hold a coordinating meeting (perhaps at the celebration event at the end of the round of study circles) where new groups and projects are announced and sign up sheets are circulated. In this way, all the study circle participants around the community will have a chance to hear each other's action ideas, work jointly with people from other study circles, and participate in action efforts as they see fit.
- Encourage the development of "follow-up" study circles that have a more narrow focus. Often, people want to continue their conversations. Some simply want to delve more deeply into the subject. Others may feel that they need to engage in more specific discussion prior to taking action. For example, people who have been part of study circles on education might go on to discuss school-based management or character education.
- If your program has the support of community institutions such as the school board or the police department, encourage those institutions to take advantage of the ideas and enthusiasm that come from the study circles. These groups can encourage their employees to participate in action groups, and they can provide financial, logistical, or in-kind support for new programs and projects that develop.

Institutional change

If major community institutions understand the potential of citizen involvement through study circles, they may decide to make study circles an ongoing part of their operations.

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School systems, police departments, and other official institutions often have auxiliary citizen's groups, such as neighborhood watch groups, parent-teacher associations, and advisory committees. These groups are sometimes small and ineffective because they fail to provide members with opportunities to speak, to take meaningful action, or to have a sense of belonging.

Study circles can help revitalize these citizen groups by making them more open and welcoming to a diversity of participants, by strengthening relationships between the citizen group and official community institutions, and by generating support for volunteer and small-group activities. For example, the police department in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, has incorporated small-group discussion into its community policing effort. As a result, neighborhood associations have attracted new members, neighbors have developed better relationships with each other, and police officers who participate in the discussions have a more effective way to interact with the residents who live on their beats.

To facilitate the development of this kind of institutional change, consider convening a strategizing meeting among the central working group, other community leaders, and some study circle participants for a "next steps" planning group. This group can present recommendations to the community on how the study circles might be institutionalized by local organizations.

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MEASURING THE OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY-WIDE STUDY CIRCLE PROGRAMS

To win support for any new program, you must be able to describe what the program will accomplish. Community-wide study circle programs are no different: government agencies, charitable foundations, and other institutions that are considering endorsing, funding, or otherwise supporting a study circle program want to know what the outcomes will be.

This is certainly a reasonable request, but it does not lend itself to easy answers. It is, in fact, impossible to predict the outcomes of a study circle program.

Check out these sample documents:

- ✓ "Discussion Leader's Evaluation Form" on page 3-21
- ✓ "Participant's Evaluation Form" on page 3-22

Ironically, the fact that study circle organizers cannot foresee or even plan for outcomes may make them more likely to occur. Since study circle ground rules specify that neither consensus nor an explicit action plan is the goal of the discussion, prospective participants know that they are entering a safe environment, free of hidden agendas. The actions that result from study circles therefore evolve naturally, and on the participants' own terms.

While some study circle outcomes are measurable, the most important one — laying the foundation for community problem solving — is very difficult to quantify. Still, organizers of virtually every community-wide study circle program can proudly point to "new actors" in the community whose leadership potential was uncovered in study circles.

In spite of the challenges inherent in designing meaningful evaluation of study circle programs, several formal efforts are underway. These will enable SCRC to better answer questions about study circle outcomes. Institutions conducting evaluation of community-wide study circle programs include:

- Edmund S. Muskie Institute of Public Affairs, University of Southern Maine;
- The Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University;
- Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio; and
- The Ohio State University at Lima.

For the remainder of this section, we offer our best understanding of study circle outcomes and how they can be evaluated.

Changes in attitude and behavior

The most easily observed outcomes are changes in individual attitudes. Study circle organizers often hear from participants that the experience has given

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them new insights, a greater understanding of views different from their own, and a renewed hope that problems and conflicts can be resolved. This is especially apparent in study circles on race relations, because people rarely have the opportunity to have candid conversations on race with people of different racial backgrounds.

Projects to measure these changes in individual attitudes and behavior are currently underway in the two Ohio communities with the longest history of community-wide study circle programs — Lima and Springfield. At The Ohio State University at Lima, an interdisciplinary team (including a psychologist, a sociologist, and an historian) is conducting a study of changes in participants' attitudes toward race. "The problem is people will say 'I know it has an effect, I can feel it in my heart,'" said Psychology Professor George Handley. "What we hope is to track whether the attitudes *remain* changed."

To do this, the researchers developed a survey of racial attitudes, which they administered to a random group of study circle participants before and after they had taken part in a study circle. The initial results showed a "significant improvement" in racial attitudes: after the study circle, respondents were more likely to accept and feel comfortable with people of different backgrounds in a variety of situations. "I would be very surprised if sitting down with a racially mixed group of people and listening to the problems wouldn't make each person more aware," Handley said. Since the research team is particularly interested in the long-term impact of the study circles, they are also conducting a longitudinal study.

The most compelling anecdotal evidence that individuals enjoy and learn from one another in study circles is that, in so many cases, they continue meeting after the "last" session. Others go on to join discussion-to-action groups. Many continue socializing with friends they first met in a study circle.

New grassroots collaborations

A well-organized study circle program produces in each discussion group a mix of people who approach a single problem from different vantage points — police officers with neighborhood residents, for example, or parents with teachers and local businesspeople. The typical result is that people recognize the different aspects of their common problem, get a better picture of how others approach it and why, and work together to create solutions based in the ideas and efforts of citizens.

For example, a group of study circle participants in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, decided that a film festival on prejudice and race relations would be a good way of getting others in the community to think and talk about these issues. A study circle in Springfield, Ohio, decided to begin a community project in which young people from different neighborhoods come together for arts activities at the local museum. Still other study circles "adopt" a block, or decide to begin neighborhood conflict resolution programs. The list of such outcomes is long and varied, and continues to grow.

Study circles' success in fostering this kind of grassroots problem solving has attracted a great deal of interest from foundations and from government at

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every level. One reason for this is the growing realization that creative grassroots participation and energy are essential to effectively address deep-rooted problems such as crime, poverty, and delinquency.

The formal evaluations of study circle programs will help to shed light on their role in creating new grassroots collaborations and will help us better understand their long-term impact.

Institutional changes

Study circle programs also produce outcomes at the institutional level by changing the ways that local institutions — such as police departments, school systems, and mayor's offices — connect to the larger community. Sometimes they even change the way these institutions operate internally.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is a striking example. Under the direction of Community Policing Coordinator Sgt. Michael Morris, the city's police department incorporated small-group discussion in several ways: as a mechanism for community police officers to interact with residents on their beats, as a way for police officials to communicate with neighborhood associations, and as a process by which all the employees of the department can devise more effective methods.

"The study circle methodology helped us move from a community policing experiment to a way of thinking that permeates the police force and the city of Baton Rouge. After three years of neighborhood roundtables, we have married the police department and the community so that citizen input, resources, and effort are part of everything we do," says Morris. This transition, which took place over three years, has been accompanied by a significant drop in the Baton Rouge crime rate. Violent crime has fallen 19% in the last year, and Sgt. Morris cites the importance of the new ways the department and the community are working together.

Around the country, study circle programs are leading to various kinds of institutional change. The study circle program on crime and violence in Lima, Ohio, is playing an important role in the development of community policing. In Yarmouth, Maine, the School Committee used a large-scale study circle program to facilitate public discussion of a town budget crisis. In a statewide program, the Ohio Department of Human Services uses study circles as an internal mechanism to improve internal relations and to help all of its employees think through the public implications of their work.

The measurement of long-term, institutional changes will, by definition, require a long time frame. But the stories of these communities and institutions suggest the kinds of changes that others can expect.

Laying the foundations

It would be a mistake to look at study circles only in the context of the specific outcomes they produce. By uncovering new leaders in the community, creating new connections, and reinvigorating existing institutions, study circles lay the foundation for more effective, community-based problem solving. As community

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members gain opportunities to create their own outcomes, the results of community-wide study circle programs fit into the local context and are more likely to receive broad public support.

When study circle organizers set out to create opportunities for public dialogue, they are not usually aware of the full potential of their efforts. Rather, they begin by seeing study circles as an effective way to address a single issue. It is only later that organizers see the study circles' results as something more fundamental, more permanent, and more valuable.

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Part 3

Sample documents

STUDY CIRCLE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION ____ 3-1
COMMUNITY SURVEY ____ 3-3
LETTER OF INVITATION TO POTENTIAL SPONSORS ____ 3-6
PLEDGE OF PARTICIPATION FOR SPONSORS ____ 3-7
PRESS RELEASE FOR KICKOFF EVENT ____ 3-8
PLEDGE OF PARTICIPATION FOR STUDY CIRCLE ORGANIZERS ____ 3-10
TIPS FOR RECRUITING DISCUSSION LEADERS ____ 3-11
PLEDGE OF PARTICIPATION FOR STUDY CIRCLE DISCUSSION LEADERS ____ 3-12
LETTER OF INVITATION FOR PARTICIPANTS ____ 3-14
PLEDGE OF PARTICIPATION FOR PARTICIPANTS ____ 3-15
STUDY CIRCLE RECORD SHEET ____ 3-17
NOW THAT WE'VE TALKED... IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ____ 3-18
AFTER THE STUDY CIRCLE... I'D LIKE TO STAY INVOLVED! ____ 3-20
DISCUSSION LEADER'S EVALUATION FORM ____ 3-21
PARTICIPANT'S EVALUATION FORM ____ 3-22

STUDY CIRCLE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

You might enclose a program description with outreach mailings, and study circle organizers might want to share copies with prospective participants. The organizing strategy described below is, of course, just one of many possible approaches. This sample document, which is specific to race relations, borrows from ones developed for study circles in Columbus and Springfield, Ohio.

The City of *[ ]* is launching a four-month initiative to engage local citizens in discussions of race relations in our community. The program will be based on the small-group, democratic discussions known as "study circles." It is modeled after successful programs already established in a number of communities around the country.

In a typical study circle, a group of 5 to 15 people meets 3 to 6 times to discuss an issue of common concern. Each meeting commonly lasts about 2 hours. Reading materials provide structure for the dialogue, and a discussion leader helps ensure lively but focused discussion. Study circles are different from the kinds of meetings people often avoid. In study circles:

- Everyone is welcome on an equal basis, without regard to credentials or connections.
- No one can "win" a study circle by being a strong advocate for one point of view. Thoughtful ambivalence is valued in a study circle.
- Study circles allow people to work collaboratively. They are small enough to allow new relationships to develop, and no one has a microphone or a podium with which to dominate the meetings.
- Study circles give participants the opportunity to explore an issue of concern without pressure to come to consensus or to make a long-term commitment.
- In a community-wide study circle program, the small groups do not work in isolation but rather are part of a larger community-building process.
- Study circles encourage people to take action as individuals, as part of small groups, and as members of large organizations.

Our Vision:

To improve the understanding and acceptance of differing races and cultures throughout the greater *[city]* area.

Our Mission:

To provide the community with practical recommendations for actions which organizations, institutions, and individuals can take to improve race relations and racial equality.

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Our Goal:

To develop a diverse community-wide network of at least forty study circles involving up to 500 people in discussions of race relations.

Our Strategy:

1. Form partnerships with public officials and organizations working to eliminate racism, and seek their support.
2. Recruit a broad group of sponsors to help carry out the program. Each will be asked to assign several study circle organizers.
3. Promote and publicize this project through the media and through sponsor organizations.
4. Work with study circle organizers as they recruit participants, identify meeting sites, and arrange for the details of individual study circles. When necessary, pair homogeneous groups of participants to create diverse study circles.
5. Train study circle discussion leaders.
6. Draw on feedback from the study circles to prepare a report for the community.

For more information, contact:
[address and phone information]

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COMMUNITY SURVEY

Your version might include a memo or letter on one side of a sheet and the survey on the back, with plenty of room for responses. Including a list of everyone receiving the survey will save respondents time — they won't spend time researching names and addresses of people you've already contacted — and help them understand the breadth of your approach.

To: Concerned individuals
From: *[working group, listing names and affiliations]*
Date: *[ ]*

No one needs to tell you about our community's need to seek grassroots commitment to address the issue of *[ ]*. That's why we are seeking your input as we work to establish community-wide dialogue on this issue.

We are considering creation of a dialogue program based on "study circles" — small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions. We envision a program in which 800 people from all walks of life join together, 12 or 15 at a time, in about 60 study circles held throughout the community.

Our inspiration comes from successful, large-scale programs in other parts of the country. We look forward to telling you more about these programs, and our initial plans, when we call a meeting for you and other potential sponsors early next month.

For now, we're doing our homework, and we need your help as we try to assess "the lay of the land." Would you please take a few moments to answer the following questions? If you feel you need to better understand the study circle concept before you do so, please give one of us a call. You can reach *[ ]* at *[###–####]*, or *[ ]* at *[###–####]*.

THANK YOU!

Please respond by *[date]*

1. On an enclosed sheet you will find a list of everyone receiving this memo, including affiliation. What other individuals or organizations are involved with *[issue]*? Sketchy information is welcome, but we'd greatly appreciate your providing as much information as possible, including contact person, affiliation, address, phone, and perhaps even a note sharing what you know about their involvement with the issue.
2. We'll rely on people from throughout the community to help us promote the program and recruit participants. Does anyone (in addition to those listed) come to mind as a likely player for this role? You might consider people from religious institutions, business, city agencies, civic and social service organizations.... Again, complete information will be greatly appreciated.

Mail your response to *[ ]*, or fax it to *[###–####]*.

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The following list is provided to help you think of organizations and agencies to whom you might send your community survey.

Businesses
- Banks
- Chamber of Commerce
- Major employers

Community Nonprofits/Civic Groups
- Citizens League
- Civil rights organizations
- Community development corporations
- Community leadership programs
- Conflict/dispute resolution programs, community mediation center
- Crime watch associations
- Ethnic organizations (Polish-American Club, etc.)
- Foundations
- League of Women Voters
- NAACP
- National Conference (formerly National Conference of Christians and Jews)
- Neighborhood associations
- Tenants' associations
- United Way
- Urban League
- Veterans associations
- Women's clubs
- YMCA
- YWCA

Education
- Board of Education
- Community Education Association
- Parent Teacher Association (PTA)/Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)
- Principals
- Superintendent
- Teachers unions

Government
- County/city/town councils or commissions
- Court systems
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Public Health
- Housing Authority
- Human Rights/Human Relations/Community Relations Commission
- Libraries
- Office of the mayor, town/city manager
- Planning Commission

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Hospitals

Law Enforcement
- Community justice council
- District/city attorney's office
- Office of Bias Crime
- Police Department

Media
- Newspapers
- Radio/television stations

Professional Associations

Religious Institutions
- Churches, synagogues, mosques
- Interfaith, interreligious, and ecumenical associations
- Ministerial associations

Senior Citizens Organizations
- AARP chapters
- Elderhostel
- Senior citizens centers

Unions

Universities, Community Colleges, Adult Education Programs
- Alumni associations
- Extension service
- Literacy organizations
- Public policy institutes
- Sororities, fraternities

Volunteer/Service Organizations
- Elks
- Junior League
- Kiwanis
- Lions
- Masons
- Rotary
- Volunteer centers

Youth Organizations
- Boys Clubs
- Girls Clubs
- Boy Scouts
- Girl Scouts
- 4-H

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LETTER OF INVITATION TO POTENTIAL SPONSORS

Dear *[potential sponsor]*,

I hope by now that you are well aware of plans to coordinate a large-scale, community-wide "study circle" dialogue program on *[issue]*. At this point, our plans for *[name of overall study circle program]* call for involving as many as 800 people from all walks of life. This is no small task, and we'll rely on people like you to help us in this effort.

We've already conducted *[#]* pilot study circles, and now we're ready to tell the world about our plans. We hope you can join us for our kickoff event, *[name of event]* on *[day of the week, date, time]*, at *[location]*. We'll hear from *[prominent speaker]* as well as from participants in our pilot study circles. They'll give first-hand accounts of how their study circles helped them increase their understanding of *[the issue]* and what we can do about it, both as individuals and as a community.

[Perhaps mention other agenda items, such as viewing a video documenting study circles in other communities.]

At this kickoff, we'll also seek the commitment of people like you to join us in *[name of overall study circle program]*. We are seeking sponsors who will promote the program, recruit participants, and organize individual study circles.

We need your support to make *[name of overall study circle program]* happen, and hope we'll see you on *[date]*!

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PLEDGE OF PARTICIPATION FOR SPONSORS

Responsibilities of [working group]

1. Form partnerships with public officials and organizations working to address *[issue]*, and seek their support.
2. Recruit a broad group of sponsors to help carry out the program. Each will be asked to assign several study circle organizers.
3. Promote and publicize this project through the media and through sponsor organizations.
4. Work with study circle organizers as they recruit participants, identify meeting sites, and arrange for the details of individual study circles. When necessary, pair homogeneous groups of participants to create diverse study circles.
5. Train study circle discussion leaders.
6. Draw on feedback from the study circles to prepare a report for the community.

Responsibilities of sponsors

1. Designate organizers for at least one study circle. (You will receive recruiting materials which describe the role of organizers.)
2. Recommend possible discussion leaders.
3. Promote the program by any means possible, including bulletins, newsletters, and personal contacts.

Name of sponsoring organization or agency that you represent:	
Your name:	
Your address:	
Your telephone, fax, e-mail:	

I understand the responsibilities of sponsors and commit my organization to this project. I intend to refer organizers for _____ study circles.

_____

Signature Date

If you've already started recruiting organizers for your study circles, please use the reverse side to provide names and contact information.

Return to: [address, etc.]

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PRESS RELEASE FOR KICKOFF EVENT

This sample document is specific to education, but can be adapted for other issues.

Notes:

- *Print your press release on key sponsor's letterhead.*
- *Leave room at the top for editor's comments.*
- *Double space for ease of editing.*
- *Use "For immediate release" or "Release date" depending on when you want it published.*
- *The "Kill date" is the date after which the story is no longer pertinent.*
- *Put "— MORE —" at the end of the page if it continues to another page.*
- *Put "— END —" or "— 30 —" at the end of the press release.*

For immediate release: *[date]*
(or **Release date:** *[date]*)

Kill date: *[date]*

[City] launches study circle program on improving education

[Lead paragraph about the educational issues your city is dealing with; if possible, include a quotation from a well-known local figure like the mayor or superintendent of schools.]

[Key sponsors] are addressing this problem by planning *[name of overall program]*, a series of "study circles" designed to help citizens and educators work together to improve the quality of education in *[city]*. Study circles are small, democratic, highly participatory discussion groups which allow citizens to address an issue, examine different views on both the problem and possible remedies, and find common ground for constructive action.

"Our goal is to have *[#]* people participating in roughly *[#]* study circles," says *[key individual]*. "*[List of several]* are among the many local organizations involved in planning and implementing the study circle program, and we've already conducted *[#]* very successful pilot study circles."

— MORE —

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On *[date of meeting]*, *[name of overall program]* will officially kick off with *[name of event]*. *[Prominent speaker]* will present a keynote address. Other presenters will include participants from the pilot study circles. *[Perhaps mention other agenda items, such as viewing a video which documents study circles in other communities or action items.]*

[Key sponsor] stresses that this is a program for everyone in the community, not just parents and school officials. Everyone who participates will be asked to commit to *[#]* weekly sessions, each lasting about 2 hours. A trained facilitator will help ensure that each study circle provides a safe atmosphere for frank, productive dialogue.

Discussions will be based on *Education: How Can Schools and Communities Work Together to Meet the Challenge*. Developed by the Study Circles Resource Center in Pomfret, CT, this booklet has provided the basis for large-scale discussion programs in other cities, including *[name an appropriate model city]* and *[name another]*.

The discussion guide will help study circle participants examine how schools affect the community, what we want our graduates to know and be able to do, *[your program's version of third session]*, and how people can make a difference. It provides examples of what has worked in other communities and suggests action possibilities available to individuals, to small groups, and to large institutions.

Organizers will seek the participation of everyone who attends the meeting. Anyone unable to attend is encouraged to call *[contact, phone number]*.

— END —

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PLEDGE OF PARTICIPATION FOR STUDY CIRCLE ORGANIZERS

Responsibilities of [working group]

1. Form partnerships with public officials and organizations working to address *[issue]*, and seek their support.
2. Recruit a broad group of sponsors to help carry out the program. Each will be asked to assign several study circle organizers.
3. Promote and publicize this project through the media and through sponsor organizations.
4. Work with study circle organizers as they recruit participants, identify meeting sites, and arrange for the details of individual study circles. When necessary, pair homogeneous groups of participants to create diverse study circles.
5. Train study circle discussion leaders.
6. Draw on feedback from the study circles to prepare a report for the community.

Responsibilities of study circle organizers

1. Become a well-informed spokesperson for the program by participating in a pilot study circle, or at least reading through the discussion materials.
2. Establish one or more study circles in collaboration with *[working group]* and the discussion leader assigned to you.
3. Recruit between 8 and 15 people for each study circle.
4. Arrange a site for each study circle and a meeting time convenient to participants and discussion leader. (We encourage you to consider establishing an early morning, lunchtime, or weekend study circle as well as the typical evening meetings.)
5. Distribute discussion materials prior to each study circle's first session.

Name of sponsoring organization or agency that you represent:	
Name of the person who recruited you:	
Your name:	
Your address:	
Your telephone, fax, e-mail:	

I understand the responsibilities of study circle organizers and agree to take on this role.
I intend to organize _____ study circles.

_____
Signature Date

Return to: [address, etc.]

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TIPS FOR RECRUITING DISCUSSION LEADERS

If you rely on study circle organizers (or others outside your working group) to recruit discussion leaders, a sheet similar to this will provide some helpful reminders.

When recruiting study circle discussion leaders, please consider the following:

1. The discussion leader is a study circle's most important person in terms of its success or failure.
2. The discussion leader must not interject his or her own personal views.
3. The discussion leader is responsible for stimulating and moderating the discussion by asking questions, identifying key points, and managing the group process. The leader is *not* a teacher or lecturer.
4. The discussion leader must be friendly, sensitive, understanding, and supportive.
5. Though the discussion leader does not need to be an expert or even the most knowledgeable person in the group, the facilitator should be the best prepared.
6. A background of leading small-group discussions or meetings is helpful.
7. A good facilitator does not stand out from the group, but is closely in harmony with it, encouraging participation and then slipping into the background when not needed to maintain the discussion's momentum.
8. Last but not least, the group facilitator must have the courage to be imperfect! Discussion leadership is a challenging task, and an important one.

When you talk to likely candidates, give them a copy of the "Pledge of Participation for Study Circle Discussion Leaders." Stress that all discussion leaders must attend one of the three scheduled training sessions. Please also send in, as soon as possible, a pledge for each of the people you recruit.

Thank you!

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PLEDGE OF PARTICIPATION FOR STUDY CIRCLE DISCUSSION LEADERS

Note that this sample document is based on the model in which individual study circle organizers recruit discussion leaders for their study circles.

Responsibilities of [working group]

1. Form partnerships with public officials and organizations working to address *[issue]*, and seek their support.
2. Recruit a broad group of sponsors to help carry out the program. Each will be asked to assign several study circle organizers.
3. Promote and publicize this project through the media and through sponsor organizations.
4. Work with study circle organizers as they recruit participants, identify meeting sites, and arrange for the details of individual study circles. When necessary, pair homogeneous groups of participants to create diverse study circles.
5. Train study circle discussion leaders.
6. Draw on feedback from the study circles to prepare a report for the community.

Responsibilities of study circle discussion leaders

1. Make a firm commitment to facilitating discussions for a four-session study circle.
2. Attend one of the three training sessions for discussion leaders.
3. Work with the organizer who recruited you to establish mutually acceptable dates and times for your sessions.
4. Help study circle participants engage in lively but focused discussions, and remain neutral. (The discussion leader should talk less than anyone else in the study circle, and should not disclose his or her own views on the issue.)

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Name of the person who recruited you and who will organize your study circle:	
Your name:	
Your address:	
Your telephone, fax, e-mail:	

Proposed training sessions are listed below. ***Please check your 1st and 2nd choices.***

			1st choice	2nd choice
July 20	Afternoon session	1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.		
July 20	Evening session	5:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.		
July 21	Morning session	8:30 p.m. - 12:30 p.m.		

All training sessions will be held at *[location]*. After we sort out people's choices for dates and times, you'll receive a postcard confirming your reservation for a training session. If you have any questions or need additional information for the training sessions or registration, please contact *[name]* at *[telephone number]*.

I understand the responsibilities of a study circle discussion leader and agree to take on the role.

_____

Signature Date

Return to: [address, etc.]

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LETTER OF INVITATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

You might share your version of this letter with your organizers. This will help them avoid re-inventing the wheel and also help ensure consistency and accuracy in describing your program. Letters should include your participants' pledge of participation and your study circle program description. Encourage organizers to follow up their letters with calls. This version is adapted from one devised for a study circle program in Glen Ridge, New Jersey.

Dear _____,

Let's talk!

Perhaps you've heard about *[name of overall program]*, a "study circle" program sponsored by *[ ]*. I'd like to invite you to participate in this exciting venture, and hope that I can count on you to join in this community-wide conversation.

In a study circle, about a dozen people meet several times to discuss the various choices our society and community might make concerning a social or political issue. Complex issues are broken down into manageable subdivisions, and controversial topics are dealt with in depth. Each discussion lasts approximately two hours and is directed by a well-prepared study circle leader whose role is to aid in lively but focused discussion.

One of the best aspects of study circles is that expertise on the topic under discussion is not necessary. Instead, study circles are a vehicle through which people like you and me can bring the wisdom of ordinary citizens to bear on important issues. All you need is a willingness to participate in the discussions and to really hear what others have to say. I can promise you the discussion will be spirited, cordial, informative and — best of all — fun!

Sponsors of the program include *[ ]*. They've already organized *[#]* pilot study circles, and here's what one participant in these pilot groups has to say about *[his/her]* experience:

"[quotable quote]," says *[key player/local dignitary]*.

Each study circle will meet once a week for *[#]* sessions. Each meeting is 2 hours long. I'm personally organizing a study circle that meets on *[day]* at *[time]*. If this is not convenient, the people organizing the overall program will try to schedule you with a group meeting at a more convenient time.

Please do let me know if you can participate. You can call *[key organizer]* at *[###–####]*, or send the enclosed Pledge of Participation to *[address]*. You are also welcome to call me *[###–####]*.

I'll be in touch!

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PLEDGE OF PARTICIPATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Responsibilities of [working group]

1. Form partnerships with public officials and organizations working to address *[issue]*, and seek their support.
2. Recruit a broad group of sponsors to help carry out the program. Each will be asked to assign several study circle organizers.
3. Promote and publicize this project through the media and through sponsor organizations.
4. Work with study circle organizers as they recruit participants, identify meeting sites, and arrange for the details of individual study circles. When necessary, pair homogeneous groups of participants to create diverse study circles.
5. Train study circle discussion leaders.
6. Draw on feedback from the study circles to prepare a report for the community.

Responsibilities of participants

1. Make a good-faith effort to attend all meetings. (Most study circles elect not to include people who miss the first session.)
2. Be prepared! Read ahead of time the brief discussion materials for each session.
3. Share your views with the group, and listen respectfully to all others.
4. Maintain an open mind.
5. Help keep the discussions on track.
6. When your views differ from those of others, disagree without being disagreeable.
7. Respect the confidentiality of the discussions.

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Name of the person who recruited you:	
Your name:	
Your address:	
Your telephone number:	

Which meeting times are most convenient for you?

	Evenings		Mid-day		Mornings	
	Mon. evening 7-9 p.m.	Thurs. evening 7-9 p.m.	Mon. mid-day 11-1	Thurs. mid-day 11- 1	Tues. morning 7-9 a.m.	Sat. morning 9-11 a.m.
pref.*						
location**						

** Please indicate 1st, 2nd, and 3rd preference.*

*** Please indicate what section of the city would be best for each of your preferences, for example "downtown," "Jackson Heights," or "Sand Hill area."*

I understand the responsibilities of a study circle participant and agree to take on this role.

_____

Signature Date

Return to: ***[address, etc.]***

Enjoy your discussions!

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STUDY CIRCLE RECORD SHEET

You might ask each study circle organizer to help you keep track of the program by filling out a simple form similar to this one. If you have a conveniently timed meeting, you will probably get a better response by distributing and collecting forms at that event. No matter how you collect the information, you should keep study circle information on a database. We recommend that, at minimum, you keep on a computer enough information to produce mailing labels for all your sponsors, organizers, discussion leaders, and participants.

To: Study circle organizers

From: *[ ]*

Date: *[ ]*

We know you are busy getting your study circle(s) underway, but we need to ask you to take just a moment to fill out this form. It is an important part of our keeping track of efforts all across the city.

Thank you!

Your name (organizer):	
Name of leader(s):	
Location of study circle:	
Name and telephone number of contact person for this site:	
What day of the week does the study circle meet?	
What time does it meet?	
What are beginning and ending dates for this study circle?	

Please respond by *[date]*

Send to:
[address/fax]

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NOW THAT WE'VE TALKED... IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

You can help your study circles move into discussion of action by providing handouts that help them think about how to become involved locally. The following combines elements of documents developed by Robert Sherman of the Surdna Foundation and the study circle organizers in Lima, Ohio and San Leandro, California.

Take stock of yourself

- Do you prefer to work alone or with a group of people?
- Could you put together a new organization?
- Do you have a specific area of interest such as child welfare, domestic violence, or intercultural understanding?
- Do you already belong to groups that are involved with these issues, or that might move in that direction?
- Do you have skills that you could share with your community? (Every community could use a gardener, a grant writer, a computer trainer for after-school programs, or a mural painter!)
- Realistically, how much time can you commit?

Take stock of your community

- As an individual or as part of a group, talk with young people, ministers, businesspeople, social service people, teachers, city officials, police officers, and neighbors to gain more perspective on your community and the issues it faces.
- Ask people about efforts to address problems in the community, and what these efforts might need in order to be more effective.
- Read sections of the newspaper that you might have ignored in the past, including local news, opinion pages, and the calendar of events.

Take ACTION!

Now that you know more about yourself and your community, choose some ways in which you might become involved.

- Apply for appointment to a city advisory commission.
- Help organize another study circle.
- Volunteer with a social service agency or nonprofit organization.
- Volunteer to help with the city's cultural diversity celebrations.
- Volunteer to work in local schools.

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- Organize or assist with a neighborhood activity (park clean-up, picnic, etc.).
- Participate in — or help develop — an ongoing neighborhood social group (i.e. monthly potlucks, weekly volleyball games) or neighborhood watch.
- Spend some time outside in your neighborhood, and make it a point to become acquainted with neighbors of all ages and backgrounds.
- Mentor a young person in an after-school program, either informally or through a Big Sisters/Big Brothers program.
- Help organize a neighborhood or citywide function to honor people working to build a stronger community. Even if you choose one or two outstanding individuals, make sure that you give more than passing acknowledgment to the hundreds of people who help in hundreds of big and little ways!

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AFTER THE STUDY CIRCLE...
I'D LIKE TO STAY INVOLVED!

The previous document helps people think about ways they might become involved with their community. The following feedback form, on the other hand, is designed to be returned to organizers of a community-wide study circle program. The form, which was originally developed by Bob Williams of the Unified School District of San Leandro, California, could be the start of a community resource bank.

I am interested in getting more involved in my community and building on the vitality of the study circle program.

I would especially like to do the following:

_____ Apply for appointment to a city advisory commission

_____ Continue to participate in the City's study circles

_____ Become a study circle organizer or discussion leader

_____ Volunteer for the Community Services Department

_____ Volunteer to help with the City cultural diversity celebrations

_____ Volunteer for a local social service agency

_____ Volunteer to work in local schools

_____ Conduct a neighborhood- or church-based study circle

_____ Organize or assist with a neighborhood activity (park clean-up, picnic, etc.)

_____ Other:

Your name:	
Your address:	
Your telephone number:	

Return to: *[address, etc.]*

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DISCUSSION LEADER'S EVALUATION FORM

This document was adapted from a form developed by Selena Singletary in Springfield, Ohio.

Please complete this form after your last discussion session and return to *[address]* no later than *[date]*.

1. Your name
2. The name of your study circle organizer
3. Where and when (day of the week and time) did your study circle meet?
4. How many times did your study circle meet?
5. Number of participants at:
   Session I ___ Session II ___ Session III ___ Session IV ___
6. How would you characterize your study circle in terms of gender, racial and ethnic make-up, political spectrum, etc.?
7. What perspectives were well represented in your group? Which were missing?
8. What were your own observations about the dialogue and group process?
9. What did members of the group say about their discussions?
10. What was the topic of the group's liveliest discussion?
11. What were areas of general agreement? What were areas with little consensus?
12. What suggestions came from the group about how people (individuals, organizations, institutions, government) might better address the issue?
13. Did you have adequate support from your study circle's organizer and from the coordinators of the overall program? If not, what additional support would have been helpful?
14. If you were to lead another study circle, what would you change? Feel free to comment on discussion materials, organization of the overall study circle program, your meeting site, your performance as discussion leader, ...
15. Do you have concerns, or did the group have concerns, which need to be discussed with the study circle program's working group?

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PARTICIPANT'S EVALUATION FORM

This form asks for a considerable amount of demographic information. You should request this information only if you have the staff time available to collate and use the responses. This document is based on a form developed by Selena Singletary in Springfield, Ohio, which was later adapted for use in San Leandro, California. The study circles in those cities focused on race relations.

Please take a few moments to read and answer the following questions as honestly as possible. You do not need to sign your name to this form. Thank you for your time.

1. What effect, if any, has the study circle had upon the following?

	increased	no change	decreased
Your ability to discuss issues openly and frankly	3	2	1
Your understanding of your own attitudes and beliefs	3	2	1
Your understanding of others' attitudes and beliefs	3	2	1
Your ability to communicate more effectively with people who may have different beliefs	3	2	1

2. Which sessions were of most value to you? Why?

3. What one activity do you feel *[city or sponsor]* is doing to facilitate better race relations in our community?

4. If you could change one thing about race relations in *[city or region of your program]*, what would it be?

5. What important issue would you like study circles to address in the future?

6. In your opinion, how should *[city or sponsor]* follow up these study circles?

7. Please list the three most serious problems facing our community which involve *[topic of study circles]*.

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Finally, we'd like to ask you a few additional questions that will help your community better understand the results of the evaluations.

8. Which age group are you in?
   ___under 18 ___18-29 ___30-44 ___45-64 ___65 & over

9. What is your sex?
   ___ male ___ female

10. What is your race or ethnicity?

11. What is your occupation?

12. What is your zip code?

13. In which of the following ranges does your family income fall?

    ___ less than $10,000 a year
    ___ $10,000 to $14,999
    ___ $15,000 to $24,999
    ___ $25,000 to 44,999
    ___ $45,000 to $64,999
    ___ $65,000 and over

14. Additional comments:

If your study circle discussion leader does not collect this form, please mail it to:
[sponsor's address]

Thank you for your feedback!

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Part 4

Stories of Community-wide Study Circle Programs

LIMA, OHIO: FERTILE GROUND FOR STUDY CIRCLES ____ 4-1

"CABIN FEVER CONVERSATIONS" KINDLE DIALOGUE IN YARMOUTH, MAINE ____ 4-6

"DAY OF DIALOGUE" STUDY CIRCLES IN LOS ANGELES GAIN NATIONAL ATTENTION ____ 4-8

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

LIMA, OHIO: FERTILE GROUND FOR STUDY CIRCLES

It is hard to have a discussion with an SCRC staff member about study circles without hearing at least one mention of Lima, Ohio. Why all the fuss about a city in western Ohio whose name no one can even pronounce? (Say it like the lima *bean*, not like Lima, Peru.)

The reason: Lima is where it all began for large-scale, community-wide study circle programs. Though other cities have added new and important ideas for creating community-wide programs, Lima provided the first concrete model. The basic steps established in Lima for creating community-wide dialogue still mesh with the ones we now encourage other organizers to follow.

The roots of the program

In late 1992, Lima Mayor David Berger brought together the resources of the city's clergy, The Ohio State University at Lima, the media, and the Study Circles Resource Center to launch a major campaign to address racial divisions.

Lima is a city of 46,000, with an African-American population of about 25%, situated in a county whose population numbers an additional 110,000 individuals. The Rodney King incident in Los Angeles heightened racial tension in Lima, and prompted a peaceful march through the downtown area on May 1, 1992. On that same day, Mayor Berger brought together a group of prominent ministers who made a public plea for peace and unity.

Mayor Berger realized at this meeting that members of the local clergy rarely had the opportunity to work together and did not really know one another. He also realized that the ministers and their congregations could be a tremendous resource in bringing about racial harmony.

As a result, the mayor's office helped to form the Clergy Task Force, made up of a dozen or so members of the clergy, and challenged them to work together to address racial tension in the city. In several meetings with the mayor's office, the task force developed a strong consensus on the need for dialogue. They were left, though, with the question of how to initiate and sustain community-wide dialogue on race relations.

At this point, Dr. Carol Fasig, Director of Continuing Education at The Ohio State University at Lima, learned of the Clergy Task Force and its search for resources. She knew just what they needed. Dr. Fasig had recently obtained a copy of SCRC's *Can't We All Just Get Along? A Manual for Discussion Programs on Racism and Race Relations*. Dr. Fasig; Dean Violet Meek, Director of OSU-Lima; Dr. James McLemore of the Clergy Task Force; Mayor Berger; and Berger's Administrative Coordinator, Ron Hagaman, held several meetings and many conversations. The result was the decision for the city, the university, and the Clergy Task Force to collaborate in sponsoring a discussion program on race relations. Plans called for the mayor's office to coordinate the program, and for The Ohio State University at Lima to provide training and evaluation.

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The Clergy Task Force met on January 6, 1993, to participate in their first study circle and to plan a kickoff meeting to introduce the other members of the clergy to this major study circle effort.

Planting the seeds

The January 26 kickoff was a huge success. Many Lima citizens spoke about the need for dialogue across racial lines. SCRC's Martha McCoy gave the keynote address and participated in the extensive media coverage, which included reports on radio, on television, and in the newspapers. By the end of the day, about 40 churches had signed on to serve as study circle sites.

Next came the pilot phase of the program. Fasig, Hagaman (representing Zion Lutheran Church as well as the mayor's office), and the Rev. McLemore (representing St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church as well as the Clergy Task Force) held a discussion leader training program for eight lay people — four African-Americans and four whites. These people then paired up to lead the pilot study circles. Ultimately, 72 people took part in the pilots.

Meanwhile, preparations were underway for the March 16 orientation meeting for ministers who had signed on to the program. At that meeting, the Rev. McLemore explained study circles and showed a video of the pilot program which was produced by Warner Cable, the local cable television company. This footage, which includes people's comments on how participation affected them, drew applause from the ministers. Hagaman and Fasig then explained how the ministers could involve their congregations in the study circle program. The ministers went home with copies of the videotape and sample inserts for their Sunday bulletins.

As the program took shape, the importance of knowing and understanding the community became evident. Recruiting churches and staying in touch with ministers who had already signed on continued to be a major focus of the mayor's office. Mayor Berger attended Sunday services at churches around town and, when it became apparent that some of the black churches were hesitant to take part, invited each of the black ministers to a special meeting. Berger learned that the ministers were concerned about the fact that the various congregations, including one synagogue, often have quite different interpretations of Scripture. Black ministers were also hesitant about opening their doors to this program because their churches often serve as safe havens for members who face prejudice in virtually every other aspect of their lives. Mayor Berger, Hagaman, and the Rev. McLemore played critical roles at this stage by listening to the ministers' concerns and helping them to see that the community was depending upon their leadership at this critical time. They pointed to anticipated rewards of the program, and assured them that they would not be asked to compromise basic beliefs or concerns.

In April 1993, nearly 200 lay leaders attended the facilitator training sessions. After this training, much of the responsibility for the program passed to the ministers. They worked in pairs to recruit participants and organize study circles joining black and white congregations.

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The effort grows

Between April 1993 and April 1994, over 1,200 Lima citizens participated in study circles on race relations. Paired religious congregations ensured a diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds in almost every group (each with 10-15 members).

In May 1994, a second "round" of study circles began. The number of participants and participating organizations grew, and many groups began supplementing *Can't We All Just Get Along?* with a variety of other discussion materials. Dr. Fasig oversaw the production of a "how-to" manual for study circles in Lima. The manual borrowed from SCRC materials, and added information specific to Lima.

The program's working group expanded to include the Allen County government and the Allen-Lima Leadership Program. The number and kinds of grassroots organizations offering sponsorship also expanded. By late 1994, the NAACP, plus a long list of businesses, neighborhood associations, city government departments, and schools had joined the churches in hosting study circles and recruiting their members as participants. The study circles met in a wide variety of locations, including churches, businesses, fire stations, and libraries. A study circle float even appeared in the annual Labor Day parade!

The involvement of so many Lima citizens inspired an interdisciplinary team of psychologists and sociologists at The Ohio State University at Lima to begin evaluating the study circles. This team is studying the effects of study circle participation on people's attitudes toward other races. *(See "Measuring the Outcomes of Community-wide Study Circle Programs" on page 2-26.)*

Successive rounds of race relations study circles continue in Lima. Hagaman, Fasig, McLemore, and the rest of the organizers go through a new cycle of publicizing and coordinating every time a new round is announced and new participants are introduced to study circles. Meanwhile, many of the original groups have continued to meet, searching the libraries, newspapers, and nightly news broadcast to find new discussion material for their ongoing conversations.

A stimulus for action

But Lima's study circles have led to more than changes of attitude and a city-wide appetite for discussion. The study circles have been wellsprings of grassroots-level action. Dozens of projects, programs, and cooperative efforts have resulted. These include youth mentoring projects, collaborative school-business efforts, a multiracial "unity choir," community service clubs at Lima high schools, a new playground, a new soup kitchen, and a neighborhood "peace zone." Most of these projects have emerged from the pooled ideas of small groups of people who have found a voice through the study circle process, and have gained the confidence to become problem solvers and community builders.

When the Lima working group — the mayor's office, OSU at Lima, and the Clergy Task Force — began the study circles in 1992, they did so out of a belief that they would be fostering a way for the community itself to develop solutions

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to racial tensions. But the organizers had no idea what those solutions would be, or that they would be so dynamic.

The long-term importance of the Lima study circle program goes far beyond its concrete, short-term results. It lies in the fact that it has provided a means by which growing numbers of people can aspire to, plan for, and work together for positive community change. As Mayor Berger puts it, "Study circles are the missing links for our communities. Their value lies in a community and its leadership owning up to a problem and committing to a specific course of action: to carry forward the dialogue."

A new issue

The mayor and many other members of the Lima community quickly recognized the potential of study circles to facilitate public involvement on any issue — not just race relations. Meanwhile, by observing the Lima program, the staff of SCRC was gaining a better understanding of how study circles can lead to concrete actions by individuals, small groups, and large institutions. SCRC incorporated this new understanding into its next community-wide discussion guide, *Confronting Violence in Our Communities*. This new guide also proved to be a vehicle for Lima's next round of study circles.

To address this new topic, the Lima coalition expanded again. The Police Department, the Allen County Sheriff's Office, the Lima-Allen Gang Coalition, the Lima City Schools, and several other organizations joined the organizing meetings. One goal was to establish connections between the study circles and the city's new community policing plan.

The Rev. Lamont Monford, a pastor who had been involved in the race relations study circles, emerged as one of the key figures in this new organizing effort. Monford, who lost his mother to violence when he was a youth, was an articulate and impassioned advocate for study circles as a way of confronting crime and violence. "Helping to organize this program was a way to release my agony and to prevent other people's mothers from getting killed," Monford said.

Study circles on violence were introduced to the media and the public at a kickoff event on January 10, 1995. The study circles began in February, and were punctuated by city-wide meetings on March 16 and May 19. At the March meeting, police helped participants understand how their discussions could tie into the new community policing program. The May meeting was coupled with Celebration '95, an opportunity for all of Lima to celebrate the successes of the study circles on both race relations and violence. It included a potluck dinner with music and other entertainment.

The study circles on violence have led to new projects around the community, to new connections between neighborhoods and community policing, and to the beginning of a city-wide, citizen-developed plan for violence prevention. Along the way, Lima has developed a large group of newly engaged, connected, and involved community members.

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Effects around the country

The Lima study circles have received praise from around the country. Ohio Governor George Voinovich has publicly commended the program. Delegations from several cities have visited Lima. The Mayor, Hagaman, Fasig, McLemore, and Meek have given countless speeches and presentations on the Lima program.

During October and November of 1994, TV stations throughout the U.S. broadcast coverage of the Lima story. The documentary "Story of a People," produced by SI Communications and narrated by Louis Gossett, Jr., featured the Lima story along with other aspects of race relations in this country. The segment on Lima conveys the power of the study circles for Lima, and has been used effectively by other working groups as a way to describe what they are trying to accomplish in their own communities.

When they started out in 1992, the organizers of the Lima program could not have foreseen that their work would be studied and emulated by communities from coast to coast. For them, the desired outcome has been achieved: a city whose residents can better communicate and collaborate to address some of the most pressing issues they face. The study circles continue, further strengthening the cultural and political fabric of Lima. According to Mayor Berger, "This city will never be the same."

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"CABIN FEVER CONVERSATIONS" KINDLE DIALOGUE IN YARMOUTH, MAINE

In New England, many citizens dread the dead of winter for two reasons: the weather and the budget process. Winter is budget season in many New England towns, when residents, town councils, and school committees must decide how they will make ends meet for their communities. Yarmouth, Maine, is no exception; in fact, the budget meetings in early 1994 had been particularly contentious, with hours of rancorous debate between people in entrenched camps.

So Yarmouth residents were particularly discouraged in the fall of 1994 when they received the news that the town's largest taxpayer, the Central Maine Power Company, would be paying almost $1 million less in taxes to the town. The value of the company's property had come down in relation to the surrounding area; this meant that the tax bill for the average resident would be going up by almost 20%. People quickly began to form their usual camps: those who wanted to drastically cut the budget for the town and its schools, and those who wanted to pay the higher taxes in order to maintain the bottom line.

Foreseeing another winter of discontent, a handful of Yarmouth residents decided to take action. Melisa Webster and Pamelia Adams, the leaders of this group, resolved to use study circles to help Yarmouth deal with its budget woes. The "Yarmouth Roundtables: Cabin Fever Conversations on the Budget Puzzle" was born.

"It seemed natural for our community to come together and have a *dialogue* about an issue," Webster said, "not like a town council or committee, where you just get up and speak your piece."

Webster and Adams intended for the study circles to address the budget problems, but not to be limited to this issue. They began promoting study circles as a proactive way to "bring diverse opinions together for discussions of critical issues impacting the community." They approached various groups and organizations in Yarmouth, including the Chamber of Commerce, the Town Council, the School Committee (equivalent to the school board in many communities), the Village Improvement Society, the Amvets, the Lions Club, churches, schools, and parent-teacher organizations. Sally Campbell of the Maine Council of Churches, who was one of the principal architects of Maine's popular "Reader Roundtables" study circle program, offered invaluable advice and support.

A steering committee was formed with representatives of many of these organizations. Rather than ask for financial contributions to support the project, the steering committee requested that organizations and individuals provide in-kind donations, such as volunteering to register participants, providing space for study circles to meet, and advertising the project.

The steering committee enlisted a variety of local officials to help develop the packet of discussion materials. The town manager, the school superintendent, and the local Council of Governments provided information on the budget

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process for the school and the town, the tax base, the recent tax revaluation, and other matters. The Maine Council of Churches and the Study Circles Resource Center provided how-to information on study circles.

All the planning came to fruition in January and February of 1995. About 100 people attended a kickoff event to sign up for the study circles, and nine study circles met three times each in the subsequent weeks. The total number of participants, 126, approximated the usual attendance at the annual town meeting, and far exceeded the attendance at any of the budget hearings held by the Town Council. The participants represented a broad cross-section of the community, and included about thirty high school students.

Results of the discussions were far-ranging. For starters, the winter budget meetings were far less divisive than usual. Adams, a member of the school committee, noted a lack of angry outbursts, an increase in thoughtful questions, and a disappearance of the mistrust between citizens and government that had previously predominated. The town officials who participated in the study circles gained a better understanding of residents' priorities and improved their ability to explain complicated legal and financial matters to citizens.

As the organizers had hoped, study circle participants also found their discussions widening beyond a narrow focus on budgets and tax revenues. They were able to consider Yarmouth's situation in general, and to discuss how this town of 8,000 could handle growth without losing its traditional character.

The educational value of the Yarmouth study circles was evident in the follow-up questionnaires. Many participants said they had learned a great deal about the budget process and the different options for resolving the tax problem.

Participants also valued the process. "There is no other environment where free discussion on a local topic among citizens is available," one participant wrote. "Any opportunity for community involvement and awareness of the town is valuable," wrote another. Most participants felt that the study circles provided a safe arena for candid, informed dialogue, and one suggested that town officials "routinely meet with citizens just for dialogue," noting that this would provide "a good way [for citizens] to support our public officials." Many town officials have agreed with these suggestions, and have begun planning ways to better incorporate dialogue and democratic principles into their decision-making processes.

Meanwhile, residents are pushing ahead with their own efforts to promote study circles. A special meeting is planned for community members to discuss the future of study circles in Yarmouth. It's too soon to tell what these efforts will yield in the long run, but it's a solid start toward the goal expressed by one participant whose evaluation form included an appeal for local leaders to "continue the process so it becomes part of our culture."

This piece, by Matt Leighninger of SCRC, first appeared in the Spring 1995 issue of SCRC's newsletter, Focus on Study Circles.

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"DAY OF DIALOGUE" STUDY CIRCLES IN LOS ANGELES GAIN NATIONAL ATTENTION

Just two weeks after the O.J. Simpson verdicts, when tensions in Los Angeles were escalating, L.A. City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas sponsored a motion in City Council: "This motion encourages a Day of Dialogue on Race Relations. The purpose of this day is to recognize the ever-widening racial divide in this City, and to try to address some of the underlying reasons and concerns, one citizen to another. We need to ensure that productive discussions take place that will begin the healing process. The goal is for there to be at least 100 such discussions from San Pedro to Sylmar throughout the day and evening. The Study Circles Resource Center will assist community groups by training facilitators who will conduct small, democratic, highly participatory discussions."

After the motion was passed unanimously by City Council, the City geared up to publicize the program. The *Los Angeles Times* published statements by community leaders in support of the Day of Dialogue. One hundred organizations around the city were recruited to host the study circles. Councilman Ridley-Thomas's office was inundated with phone calls until just hours before the first discussions were to begin. The City Attorney's office recruited facilitators, including many from the City's Dispute Settlement program.

The staff of SCRC also geared up. From the moment the City Council began considering the "Day of Dialogue," Ridley-Thomas was in touch with SCRC. We asked Fran Frazier of the Ohio Department of Human Services, and Stephen Thom of the Community Relations Service of the U.S. Justice Department (based in Los Angeles), to assist with the training of study circle leaders.

On the day of the training, camera crews and journalists crowded into the room as Frazier, Thom, and SCRC Executive Director Martha McCoy trained over one hundred people to be study circle leaders. Everyone took part in practice study circles and worked together to prepare for the challenges of the following day. The City Attorney's office then assigned the discussion leaders to various sites around the city.

On the Day of Dialogue itself, thousands of people, at approximately one hundred locations all over Los Angeles, began meeting in small groups to talk about the issues that are dividing them. Even Angelenos who weren't part of the discussions knew that something unique was happening in the city. Local television and radio coverage punctuated the day. Both NBC and ABC covered the event in their evening news broadcasts, and included footage of the actual study circles. This national coverage made it possible for people all over the country to see what can happen when leaders are determined to make dialogue a priority.

Many study circle participants took the day off from work, believing that this was an opportunity too important to miss. Some community-based groups, such as churches, opened their doors to the public. Other organizations held study circles among their employees. At the Los Angeles Hilton, for example, staff members talked about how race relations affected them in the workplace.

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Most of the study circles were racially and ethnically mixed, but in more homogeneous groups facilitators helped to bring out a range of viewpoints. In Victory Outreach, a community center in South Los Angeles, former gang members and others relished the opportunity to say what they felt. In an often moving and angry discussion, the group of mostly African-American men talked about their experiences, their hopes for the community, and the part they want to play in rebuilding Los Angeles.

Throughout the city, study circle participants felt positive, apprehensive, and eager for the discussions to continue. They knew that one day was not enough, but that continuing the study circles could lead to constructive community change. U.S. Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ) attended some of the study circles, and encouraged people to continue the dialogue. He also encouraged them not to stop with talk, to "connect it to personal and collective responsibility."

It is already clear that the "Day of Dialogue" will become *Days* of Dialogue. There has been a tremendous level of public response to the discussions, and many organizations have contacted the City Council and SCRC to find out how they can become involved. The City Council is overseeing an effort to establish a foundation called Dialogue Now, which will help support the ongoing study circle program.

In a city that is struggling with divisions and complex problems, the "Day of Dialogue" showed that people can work together to make a difference. Once again, Los Angeles became a symbol of the deep divisions that exist in our society — but this time, the city also became a symbol of what communities can do to begin to bridge those divisions.

This piece first appeared in the Winter 1996 issue of SCRC's newsletter, Focus on Study Circles. *For copies of the complete City Council motion and of national news coverage of the Los Angeles "Day of Dialogue," contact SCRC.*

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Part 5

Appendices

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY BUILDING ____ 5-1
A COMPARISON OF DIALOGUE AND DEBATE ____ 5-6
POSITIVE CONFLICT: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR DEMOCRACY ____ 5-8
STUDY CIRCLES AND ACTION ____ 5-10
WHY THE SUDDEN INTEREST IN DIALOGUE AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION? ... AND WHERE DO STUDY CIRCLES FIT IN? ____ 5-11
NEWSPAPER COVERAGE ____ 5-13
RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY-WIDE DISCUSSION PROGRAMS (ORDER FORM)

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY BUILDING

The publications listed here contain useful ideas for organizing citizen involvement programs.

Adams, Bruce. *Building Healthy Communities.* Charlottesville, VA: Pew Partnership for Civic Change, 1995. For more information about the Pew Partnership and its reports, write to the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, 145-C Ednam Drive, Charlottesville, VA 22903, call (804) 971–2073, or fax (804) 971–7042.

One in a series of research reports commissioned by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change. Adams lays out some of the elements of a healthy civic community, illustrated with examples of how citizen leadership can work. He focuses on the differences between productive and divisive communities, and lays out guidelines for overcoming divisions. Includes lists of background reading and key organizations.

Axner, Marya. *The Grassroots Community Leadership Project Curriculum.* Pomfret, CT: Topsfield Foundation, 1992. To order this curriculum, write to the Topsfield Foundation, Inc., PO Box 203, Pomfret, CT 06258, call (860) 928–2616, or fax (860) 928–3713.

A five-module curriculum for learning and practicing leadership skills. The curriculum helps participants to see themselves as leaders; solve community problems through collaboration; use their leadership roles to inspire and teach other people to lead; and resolve conflicts within and among community groups and institutions. Each module includes interactive exercises and other class activities. A GCLP course could help leaders who emerge from the study circle program to further realize their leadership potential.

Briand, Michael K. *Building Deliberative Communities.* Charlottesville, VA: Pew Partnership for Civic Change, 1995.

Another in the series *(see Adams, above)* of research reports commissioned by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change. Briand describes the role deliberation can play in creating new opportunities for communities to work together. He explains some of the main principles underlying deliberation, cites some of the most influential authors, and describes some projects which have given voice to citizens representing all segments of the community. Includes lists of background reading and key organizations.

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Chrislip, David D., and Larson, Carl E. *Collaborative Leadership: How Citizens and Civic Leaders Can Make a Difference.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994.

A description of the new generation of citizen-government collaborations that have been created to help solve community problems. Chrislip and Larson explain why citizen-government collaborations are so needed and so effective, and reveal some of the most successful leadership strategies. This book will be particularly helpful for those who are building study circle coalitions.

Creighton, James L., Ph.D. *Involving Citizens in Community Decision Making: A Guidebook.* Washington, DC: Program for Community Problem Solving, 1992. To order, write PCPS Publications, 915 15th Street NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20005, or call (202) 783–2961

A guide to help community leaders fashion citizen participation programs that inform members of the public, solicit their reactions to proposed actions or policies, and engage them in problem solving and decision making in their communities.

Delgado, Gary. *Beyond the Politics of Place: New Directions in Community Organizing in the 1990s.* Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center, 1994. For more information, write to the Applied Research Center, 440 Grand Avenue, Suite 401, Oakland, CA 94610.

An update on the community organizing movement. Though community organizing and study circle program organizing are different, some of the techniques, stories, and resources described in this book may be helpful to study circle organizers. It includes sections on training community organizers, finding financial and technical support, and organizing in communities of color.

Kaye, Gillian, and Wolff, Tom, Ph.D., eds. *From the Ground Up: A Workbook on Coalition Building and Community Development.* Amherst, MA: AHEC/ Community Partners, Spring, 1995. To order, write to AHEC/Community Partners, 24 South Prospect Street, Amherst, MA 01002, or call (413) 253–4283.

This guide, supported by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, includes very practical suggestions for building community coalitions. The chapters look at goals for community development, the assumptions underlying coalition building, and principles for successful collaboration. The book gives special attention to two aspects that are critical to most community-wide study circle programs: creating ethnically diverse coalitions, and developing grassroots involvement. Worksheets and resource lists are included.

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Kettering Review. Dayton, OH: Charles F. Kettering Foundation. For more information, write to the Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Road, Dayton, OH 45459–2799, or call (513) 434–7300.

A journal of ideas and activities dedicated to improving the quality of public life in the American democracy. Many issues contain articles that will be of interest to study circle organizers.

Mattessich, Paul W., and Monsey, Barbara R. *Collaboration: What Makes It Work.* St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1994. To order, write to the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation Publishing Center, 919 Lafond Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104, call (800) 274–6024, or fax (612) 642–2088.

A summary of the key factors involved in successful collaborations. Mattessich and Monsey reviewed 18 studies on collaborations between governments, human service agencies, and community organizations, and interviewed a number of key researchers. The result is a basic outline of what works and what doesn't in six categories: environment, membership, process/structure, communications, purpose, and resources. The book is particularly relevant for building study circle coalitions.

McCoy, Martha, "Dialogue on Race Relations: Rebuilding Community." Reprinted from the Winter 1995 issue of *Doing Democracy*, the newsletter of the Center for Living Democracy. To order, complete the order form ("Resources for Community-wide Discussion Programs") located at the end of this guide.

This article outlines the study circle program in Lima, Ohio, and describes its impact on the community.

McCoy, Martha L., and Sherman, Robert F. "Bridging the Divides of Race and Ethnicity." Reprinted from the Spring-Summer 1994 issue of the *National Civic Review.* To order, complete the order form ("Resources for Community-wide Discussion Programs") located at the end of this guide.

This article provides specific examples of communities that have established institutions for genuine, effective interracial interaction. It shows how, in New York City, the Increase the Peace Volunteer Corps integrated dialogue and conflict resolution methods to build understanding and ease intergroup tensions, and it describes the healing effects of study circle programs in Lima and Springfield, Ohio.

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McKnight, John L., and Kretzmann, John P. *Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets.* Evanston, IL: The Neighborhood Innovations Network of the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research at Northwestern University, 1993. For more information, write to the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Neighborhood Innovations Network, Northwestern University, 2040 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208, call (708) 491–3518, or fax (708) 491–9916.

A comprehensive, hands-on guide for identifying and capitalizing on community assets of all kinds. The chapters focus on strengthening individual capacities, empowering local organizations, rebuilding the community economy, and providing support for this "asset-based development." The book is very helpful for translating the enthusiasm and ideas of study circle participants into positive community change. It includes plenty of stories, charts, action steps, and sample forms.

National League of Cities. *The NLC Futures Reports.* Washington, DC: NLC, annually. For more information, call the NLC Publications Center at (301) 725–4299.

A series of reports, published annually, on how cities can address critical problems. Each includes a long list of successful programs around the country. Past issues include: "Diversity & Governance: Changing Populations and the Futures of Cities and Towns" (1991); "Families & Communities" (1992); "Global Dollars and Local Sense: Cities and Towns in the International Economy" (1993); and "Rethinking Public Safety" (1994). The reports can be useful for involving local government in your program, and the examples they describe are useful models for collaborative projects among study circle participants, government, and businesses.

Schaffer, Jan, and Miller, Edward D., eds. *Civic Journalism: Six Case Studies.* Washington, DC: Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 1995. For more information, write to Pew Center for Civic Journalism, PO Box 7413, Washington, DC 20044–7413.

A collection of case studies which demonstrates the ways that civic journalism seeks to improve journalism, to stimulate civic discourse, and to involve citizens in the life of their communities. Issues covered range from crime and violence in the neighborhoods of Charlotte, North Carolina, to citizen involvement in the political process in Madison, Wisconsin; Tallahassee, Florida; Boston, Massachusetts; San Francisco, California; and Seattle, Washington. Can be useful as you think about media participation in your study circle program.

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Thomson, Ken; Bissetta, Joanne; and Webb, Thomas. *Participation Works.* Medford, MA: The Lincoln Filene Center at Tufts University, 1994. To order, write to Tufts University, Lincoln Filene Center, Medford, MA 02155, call (617) 627–3453, or fax (617) 627–3401.

A report on effective citizen participation programs. This is one of the publications that resulted from the National Citizen Participation Development Project, which examined initiatives in Birmingham, Dayton, Portland, San Antonio, and St. Paul. It uses case studies from those communities to describe successful participation practices in environmental action, crime prevention, participatory planning, and city budget processes.

White, Otis, ed., *Community Leadership Quarterly.* Decatur, GA: The Community Leadership Co. For subscription information, write to *Community Leadership Quarterly*, PO Box 1687, Decatur, GA 30031–1687, phone (404) 371–9534, fax (404) 373–3804, or E-mail <71053.2400@compuserve.com>.

Each issue of this newsletter includes practical, hands-on articles about organizing and leadership at the community level. Many issues deal explicitly with the race relations dynamic, and all include action suggestions for overcoming various obstacles to effective organizing.

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A COMPARISON OF DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.

Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.

In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.

In debate, winning is the goal.

In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.

In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.

Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.

Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.

Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.

Debate defends assumptions as truth.

Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.

Debate causes critique of the other position.

Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.

Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.

Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.

Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.

In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other peoples' reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.

In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.

Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.

Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.

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In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.

In debate, one searches for glaring differences.

In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.

In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.

Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.

Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.

Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.

Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.

Dialogue remains open-ended.

Debate implies a conclusion.

Adapted from a paper prepared by Shelley Berman, which was based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Other members included Lucile Burt, Dick Mayo-Smith, Lally Stowell, and Gene Thompson. For more information on ESR's programs and resources using dialogue as a tool for dealing with controversial issues, call the national ESR office at (617) 492–1764.

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POSITIVE CONFLICT: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR DEMOCRACY

Americans hate conflict. An employer promotes a subordinate for being "a good team player" who "doesn't make waves." A principal decides his good teachers are those with orderly classrooms without noise and — above all — without conflict. A parent praises his teenager for being "a good kid" who "never gives me problems." Entire minority communities are praised or cursed according to whether they "cause trouble" or are seen as "peaceful, good folk."

It may not matter that the thinking, creative employee may challenge conventional wisdom in ways that lead to product innovation. Or that children learn best when they are actively engaged in a subject — which may mean noise and even disagreement. Or that a teenager's developmental tasks include coming to a sense of ownership of his own values, which may require understanding them *in relation* to the values of his elders. Or that in order to take their rightful place in the American democracy, a minority community may have to demand resources and focus attention on issues that others would prefer to ignore.

Yet if we ask Americans what they think of when they hear the word conflict, we receive answers like "tension," "power grabs," "nastiness," "fights," "win/lose," "war," and "anger." Is it any wonder, therefore, that we Americans try to avoid conflict at all costs?

Indeed, this limited perspective logically leads to a version of the "flight or fight" response: either avoid conflict or be prepared to "duke it out." And since disagreements — about values, resources, and policies — are unavoidable, our courts are clogged and our city councils hold endless hearings in which parties fight over their respective positions.

We have created a contentious public culture in which a modern warrior class — mainly politician, lobbyists and highly paid lawyers — argue over every imaginable issue while the rest of us shun "politics" as the public arena of hostile interests groups. Fight or flight, battle or avoidance.

There is hope, however, in this ugly picture. Millions of Americans are acknowledging that neither fight nor flight is a very successful strategy. They are learning that one of the key barriers to a satisfying public life is the very limited set of responses we have to conflict. Fighting over our problems leaves us with polarized positions, and fleeing only allows our problems to grow larger. Yet our nation's problems are so enormous, so complex, so interrelated, we'll never arrive at real solutions by avoiding them or arguing from fixed, narrow positions.

Many are experimenting with techniques for using conflict constructively — with books like *Getting to Yes* soaring to the top of the bestseller list — but before many of us will make the effort to learn new skills we have to uproot our own prejudices about conflict. We have to fully grasp its *positive* functions:

Conflict means success, not failure. The absence of conflict usually means that diverse perspectives have been excluded from the decision-making table. When conflict — the clash of views and values — surfaces, we can congratulate ourselves. It means all interested parties are taking the first step in real problem

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solving. In order to produce a quality solution, different views must be heard, critically evaluated, and reflected upon before we reach agreement. In fact, the very idea of discussion presupposes different points of view.

Conflict uncovers interests. Often we only fully understand our own interests as they emerge in dialogue with others. Conflict can shake us out of selfishness (narrowly defined interests) as we see the larger consequences of our views through the eyes of those who disagree. Conflict that surfaces divergent interests is a necessary first step in meeting everyone's interest.

Conflict deepens our understanding of a problem. Solutions depend on accurately defining a problem. Considering diverse definitions of a problem — and the consequences of proposed solutions — helps sharpen our understanding of our most complex problems.

Conflict provides more options for action. One of the most common mistakes in problem solving is developing a premature commitment to one solution without being aware of alternatives. Conflict broadens our view of what is possible, and thus gives us more choices.

Conflict is not about "winning or losing" but about learning. Every difference, discomfort, or disagreement can be used to better know ourselves and others. They become clues to uncovering concerns, prejudices, needs, values — and goads to improving the skills we need to interact with others.

Conflict builds organizations. Groups that successfully use conflict for learning become stronger; they believe in themselves more. With confidence in their ability to use conflict constructively, they can take more risks. Since healthy conflict stimulates involvement in the problem-solving process, and encourages each of us to be heard, it deepens our sense of ownership, both of the process and, eventually, the solution.

Conflict will not go away. Yet, think how much energy and time we waste trying to avoid it or engaging in destructive battles. Simply perceiving conflict as both inevitable and useful — even essential — to healthy public discussion is the first step in turning it from a curse to a creative tool.

Study circles have much to offer in developing these democratic attitudes and skills. People usually enter study circles not as protagonists but as learners, so they can focus on those arts of democracy that produce quality talk while they learn to handle disagreements that may arise. A study circle provides an ideal setting to deepen understanding, exercise public imagination, engage in constructive dialogue, and creatively address value conflicts. A reinvigorated democracy, and fully engaged citizens, require nothing less.

This article, by Paul Martin Du Bois and Frances Moore Lappé, first appeared in the Fall 1991 issue of SCRC's newsletter, Focus on Study Circles. *Du Bois and Lappé are co-founders of the Center for Living Democracy. You can reach CLD at RR #1 Fox Road, Brattleboro, VT 05301, (802) 254–1234, fax 254–1227.*

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STUDY CIRCLES AND ACTION

It's a question SCRC hears frequently: "How do study circles connect to action on public issues?" As an organization that works to "promote deliberative democracy and improve the quality of public life," and is committed to learning from those who are putting democracy into practice, our answer continues to evolve. These days it encompasses three aspects of action.

We have always assumed that, at the very least, participation in study circles makes people better informed, more understanding of other viewpoints, and able to vote more intelligently. These results of dialogue embody the idea that "to understand is to act." With every change in an individual, every study circle nibbles away at the polarization and grandstanding that currently dominate our public life. On a grand scale, this can result in a greater sense of ownership of public issues, as well as in elections defined more by substance than style.

"Government by the people," however, means more than just voting. In the hands of many organizers, study circles have become a way of directly communicating the views and values of citizens to officials in government and in the schools. These organizers have shown that providing input is another important way to take action. Reports written jointly by study circle members, individual letters from study circle participants, and structures like the Study Circle Council in Lima, Ohio, funnel ideas and concerns from participants to community leaders.

Beginning in 1992, community-wide study circle programs began to demonstrate yet another link between study circles and action. For the first time, hundreds of citizens in a single community became involved in study circles — because they believed that by doing so they themselves could make a difference on an issue. Organizers were often surprised to see the collaborative efforts that resulted from dialogue, since neither consensus nor an explicit action plan is the goal of a study circle. But the action had evolved very naturally, as participants shared personal experiences, analyzed public problems, discovered common ground, and identified community assets. By participating in democratic and collaborative *dialogue*, they gained the understanding and connections they needed for democratic and collaborative *action*. As people realized they could make real change, they began to think of themselves as actors on public issues — not simply as the people who elect the actors or the people who give input to the actors.

Examples of these collaborative efforts resulting from community-wide study circles around the country include: youth mentoring projects; a film festival on ethnic diversity; collaborative school-business efforts; a multiracial "unity choir;" improvements to a community policing program; new playgrounds; a new soup kitchen; neighborhood "peace zones;" and a city-wide planning process for violence prevention. These kinds of collaborative efforts to address public problems define citizenship broadly and actively.

These three aspects of action represent three visions of how best to strengthen the connection between citizens and public life. Whichever vision you are working toward, one thing is clear: study circles are a way of doing the essential work which must come before action. No matter what avenue citizens decide to take — voting differently, or communicating with leaders, or working collaboratively to address problems — study circles help them to think of themselves as members of a community capable of action.

This piece, by Matt Leighninger of SCRC, first appeared in the Summer/Fall 1995 issue of SCRC's newsletter, Focus on Study Circles.

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WHY THE SUDDEN INTEREST IN DIALOGUE AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION? ... AND WHERE DO STUDY CIRCLES FIT IN?

All of a sudden, words like "dialogue," "citizenship," and "community" are popping up in the headlines. In the last year, many public figures have begun using them, and endorsing concepts like "community-building," "civic renewal," "collaborative leadership," and "public journalism." These terms have spread beyond the relatively small crowd of academics and organizers who used them in the past. Now, there are references to dialogue and democratic participation in the speeches of President Clinton, William Bennett, Senator Bill Bradley, and presidential candidate Lamar Alexander.

Recent articles by scholars and practitioners such as Robert Putnam, Bruce Adams, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Benjamin Barber have fleshed out these concepts. A host of new organizations and efforts, including the Alliance for National Renewal, the American News Service, America Speaks, and the Civic Practices Network, are convening some of the thinkers and doers, and identifying examples of communities and programs that embody the cutting edge of democratic practice.

Many of these leaders and organizations have turned their attention to the study circle, a proven method for strengthening dialogue and democratic participation. The community-wide study circle program — in which study circles are used throughout a community to engage citizens in discussion and problem solving — is a vital model for this work. As a result, SCRC has become a focal point for this new, larger audience.

Why now? It is no secret that for many years large numbers of American citizens have felt alienated and disconnected from government and from public life in general. Some of the symptoms of this problem have been evident for a long time: falling voter participation, increasingly nasty political campaigns, and a declining sense of community. So why, all of a sudden, are more people paying attention to the need for dialogue and democratic participation?

Much of the new interest comes from public officials, who are beginning to realize that the old debates don't connect to citizens in their struggles to deal with the issues that affect their lives and their communities. It is becoming more difficult to rely on the old "right-wing" or "left-wing" ideas and policies, because those ideas and labels no longer resonate much with citizens.

Conservative and liberal public officials are interested in dialogue and democracy for very different reasons. Conservatives have long championed the need to reinforce family and community values, but they've never been more eager to find a mechanism for doing it. Many conservative thinkers and leaders have realized that merely keeping "big government" out of the way is not enough. In the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, William Bennett has called for a "return to civil society." Lamar Alexander advocates local organizing to confront community problems — his campaign slogan is "The people know what to do."

At the same time, liberals who believe in the power of government to address social problems are facing the reality that growing numbers of taxpayers don't share this belief — or at least aren't willing to sustain government spending. By encouraging citizens to examine problems like crime and poverty, liberals hope to foster community-based programs that help pick up where government has left off. Some

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liberal thinkers and leaders also suspect that citizens who take a hard look at community problems will realize that a role for government is necessary.

As public leaders from the right and the left look for the center, they are discovering ideas like active citizenship, civic renewal, and community values.

Why study circles? Through study circles, citizens and public leaders in a growing number of communities are finding a way to turn these ideas into reality. When leaders in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors collaborate to organize a community-wide study circle program, they establish open, democratic spaces where citizens can work together. Several aspects of study circles make them ideal for reinvigorating public life:

1. They provide a safe, structured environment for dialogue. It's difficult to know how to enter into a productive dialogue with neighbors or complete strangers who may have views that are different from our own. The study circle ground rules and the presence of a trained facilitator create an atmosphere that welcomes a range of viewpoints and allows people to deal productively with their differences.

2. They nurture the personal relationships that make up community networks. In well-organized study circle programs, each study circle contains a mix of people who approach a single problem from different vantage points — black and white citizens, for example, or parents and teachers. Forming these new relationships is the most basic step in building community and overcoming divisions. When many of these relationships become intertwined in a community, the resulting web forms a basis for cooperation and for the discovery of shared values.

3. They help citizens solve problems and make a difference on the issues that concern them. Most Americans care deeply about issues, but feel helpless to do anything about them. Community-wide study circle programs provide citizens with an opportunity to make a difference. By helping people come up with solutions on different levels — as individuals, as members of small groups, and as members of large institutions — they help citizens begin thinking of themselves as part of a community capable of solving its problems.

Study circles and public life. All kinds of people find what they are looking for in study circles. Conservatives and liberals, public leaders and citizens can look to community-wide study circle programs around the country to find examples of dialogue and democratic participation in practice. As more organizers make study circles work effectively in their own communities, they are providing variations on the theme, and a wider range of models for others.

SCRC will continue to tell the story of these communities so that their lessons can be applied to the new questions about dialogue and democratic participation. As we do so, we realize the need to keep in mind the reasons that citizens and public leaders are asking these questions in the first place. Study circles provide a flexible formula for renewing our civic culture. Through the effort and ingenuity of citizens, community leaders, and national political figures, study circles can help form a new foundation for American public life.

This piece, by Matt Leighninger of SCRC, first appeared in the Winter 1996 issue of SCRC's newsletter, Focus on Study Circles.

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NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

18A Monday, January 1, 1996 THE WICHITA EAGLE

The Wichita Eagle
Established 1872
Incorporating The Wichita Beacon

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EDITORIALS

1996 politics

Today is the first day of a new year. It is a good day for Americans to resolve to be responsibile citizens, to work with others to better their communities. And because it is an election year, today is also a good day to think about how each person can nurture democratic institutions.

The focus on politics will not interest the many Americans who will view the 1996 election as something that has little relevance in their personal live; these are people who frequently view politics as a waste of time.

Politics, however, can be defined as the means by which a society makes choices. It may choose change or it may choose the status quo. Politics is not always centered in campaigns or in government. Indeed, it can be argued that the purest form of politics in a democracy is at the grass roots where citizens come together to solve their own problems and the problems of their community. In Wichita, study circles are being organized so that citizens can meet to discuss ways to counter crime and violence.

Some background on the study circle idea: In 19th-century America, small groups met to discuss shared concerns in much the same way that study circles across the country today are meeting in churches, homes, civic clubs and schools. Modern-day groups of five to 15 people are talking about how society can cope with problems into the next century.

What these groups do is share their expertise and their ideas. Everyone has a chance to speak. They learn from each other. In some cases, individuals in a study circle will be moved to organize for social or political change. If the issue they are discussing, for example, is how to combat hunger in a community with a high unemployment rate, then several of the group could organize a soup kitchen.

The Study Circles Resource Center is a non-profit, non-partisan organization located in Pomfret, Conn. SCRC provides assistance to communities that want to utilize study circles as a means for resolving community-wide concerns. In Lima, Ohio, a community of approximately 46,000 people, 25 percent of the population is African American. For many years racism was an unresolved problem in the city.

Finally it was determined that something had to be done to lessen a continuing and detrimental problem of poor race relations. But before action was possible, dialogue had to take place. Thus, Lima's mayor, its black and white clergy and others invited SCRC to help them establish the study-circle process in Lima.

The result was a community that learned to talk candidly about race in small groups. By opening up lines of communication, racial problems were considerably improved. Next, law enforcement and the courts in Lima involved people in study groups on violence.

In Los Angeles, four days after the O.J. Simpson verdict was announced, study circles with trained facilitators met in 100 sites across the city for three-hour study circle sessions on race relations. Organizers believe that the interaction built racial understanding during a difficult and potentially dangerous time. The Los Angeles fire department has held study circles on race relations as well.

In Wichita, study circles on violence are now being organized in a variety of the city's churches, civic and social service organizations; they number 30 to date. Volunteer facilitators will be trained so that discussions can stay focused and everyone in a group will have a chance to participate. SCRS has provided a discussion guide on community violence to help get dialogue started. A recorder will take notes of each meeting.

Individual groups will meet over the next few months – once a week, once a month, or just for one long session. The only requirement is that once someone volunteers to be in a study circle, he or she must attend meetings.

Each group's goal is deliberation. The objective is finding common ground. The study circle organizers hope to compile a report of all the meeting minutes to be used by community leaders as a resource in dealing with violence. The resulting citizen-leader partnership is an excellent example of grass-roots political participation.

Wichita's study circle project is sponsored by the League of Women Voters — Wichita Metro, Wichita Independent Neighborhoods, Wichita Ministerial League, Churches United for Peacemaking, and Hugo Wall School of Urban and Public Affairs at Wichita State University.

Sen. Bill Bradley, D-N.J., has said on the matter of citizen-based discussions through the Study Circles Resource Center: "We must enlist all who love their communities and nation in a rebellion against violence that is waged locally, neighbor by neighbor, building by building. SCRC provides the kind of help we need to build the bonds of community that render violence moot."

Many steps have already been taken by citizen-initiated groups in Wichita to combat crime and violence. The study circle process is yet another way of involving ordinary people in community-based discussion and by doing so, politically empower them.

Attention on politics in 1996 will be centered on electing government leaders. It is certainly important that an informed electorate participate by at least voting. It is also important that citizens participate directly in political decisions by being involved in grassroots activities such as study circles.

Anyone who is interested in being a part of Wichita's study circles to discuss violence may call Mike Poage, Fairmount United Church of Christ, (316) 682-1597 or Lea McCloud, National Conference of Christians and Jews, (316) 264-0356.

Vote, participate in a study circle

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The Times
SUNDAY
April 16, 1995
SHREVEPORT ■ BOSSIER CITY ■ ARK-LA-TEX
A Gannett newspaper

Improving race relations is an important issue in cities nationwide. In this third of a four-part series, we take a look at how Lima, Ohio, is facing down its race problems.

SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

City bonds to fight racism

■ Lima, Ohio finds plan that's working.

By DUNSTAN PRIAL
The Times

LIMA,Ohio — On the morning after four white police officers were acquitted in the video-taped beating of black motorist Rodney King — 1,500 miles removed from the burning and looting in South Central Los Angeles — Lima, Ohio, Mayor David Berger arrived to work early.

Berger

■ More on Lima, 8A

Fearing that a planned protest march through downtown Lima that day would escalate into violence, Berger called together the prominent members of the city's clergy — both black and white.

Sporadic incidents of racial strife in the 1970s and 1980s had left what city officials now describe as "an underlying tension" just below the surface of Lima's apparently calm status quo.

And despite its location — nestled in rolling farmland midway between Dayton and Toledo — Lima, a typical Midwestern city of about 45,000, was not immune to the big city scourges of gangs and drugs.

Resentment stemmed from various sources.

Many African-American residents believed media accounts of the city's crime perpetuated the common perception that problems exist only in minority communities.

White residents, meanwhile, openly warned visitors not to remain in Lima's largely minority populated downtown neighborhoods after dark.

It's too early to say for certain, but that meeting in the spring of 1992 may have served as the catalyst for a profound change in the relationship between blacks and whites in Lima. The mayor discovered at the meeting that racial divisions existed even in Lima's religious community. To Berger's surprise, many of the black and white ministers had to be introduced.

It was time the city — with a 25 percent black population and its past history of racially tinged violence — took a hard look at race relations, the mayor says now. "I realized we needed to make an honest attempt to somehow understand the problem and work on a resolution."

Nearly three years have passed since Berger decided to face race relations head on, and while no one in Lima would suggest perfect racial harmony exists, a stable and expanding foundation has been laid for increased and ongoing dialogue between blacks and whites.

Study circles

"Perception is reality," says Rev. Lamont Monford, pastor at Philippian Missionary Baptist Church, a predominantly black congregation on Lima's economically depressed southside.

Perceptions, however, are sometimes inaccurate, especially among the races, Monford said.

Monford

But how does a community, much less a nation, clear up those perceptions when blacks and whites have so little contact? Why not just sit down and talk?

Enter the role of study circles.

Study circles is a concept founded in early 1992 by the Study Circles Resource Center in Pomfret, Ct. It is an elaborate program with a simple goal — bring together small groups of diverse people for open dialogues on differences between them.

Dr. Carol Fasig, director of Continuing Education at Ohio State University at Lima, had recently obtained a copy of a study circles pamphlet when she was contacted in 1992 by Berger's office and asked to participate in improving race relations in Lima.

"It was a perfect fit," she says now of the study circles program.

Lima officials decided that the church community, because of its spiritual base and structured foundation, was the place to start. It has proved to be a wise decision.

Initially, eight leaders from two Lima churches — the predominantly black St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal and predominantly white Zion Lutheran — were trained to run study circles.

The first meeting, in January 1993, attracted 45 people. The meetings continued over four sessions in a structured order designed to cover specific issues, said Ron Hagaman, an administrative assistant to Mayor Berger charged with oversight of the study circles program.

In small groups of 10 to 12 people, black and white participants spent two hours discussing topics they likely had never before raised with members outside their race.

The emotionally charged issue of affirmative action, for example, was discussed in terms of white and black perspectives on the pros and cons of systematic efforts to provide opportunities to minorities, Hagaman said. Trained leaders prevented the discussion from degenerating into finger pointing arguments.

"The book we used to establish the program said we could do it with all white groups. That's a bunch of baloney. You have got to have blacks sitting across from whites," he said.

Discussing racism

The first topic participants covered was each member's earliest recollection of how race or racism affected them. Hagaman said the level of honesty reached early on between group members was startling.

Walls of perception came tumbling down, and perceived differences were discovered to be shared values.

Participants learned that drug abuse and gangs exist in both the white and black communities.

More obscure, perhaps, but no less important were discussions on interracial dating and marriage. Black and white parents expressed concerns not so much for the interracial relationships, but for how those relationships would be received in the community, and the affect that reception would have on mixed couples and their children, Monford said.

■ See PLAN, Page 8A

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8A SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 1995 THE TIMES

SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Plan a 'perfect fit' for Lima

■ Continued from Page 1A

"What happened in the study circle groups was that it put a name and a face to the perception and the statistics," said Monford, whose church participated in the second phase of the program. "People became aware of what was happening across town and to the real people involved."

The pilot program was expanded first to 38 churches and now involves 49 and some 1,200 people.

City officials and members of the clergy had no idea the program would catch on with such enthusiasm. By the end of the second or third study circles meetings, group members were invariably apprehensive about what direction to take next.

At that point, the city administration and the clergy leaders stepped out of the way. Said Mayor Berger: "We told them, 'We don't know. Go do it.'"

And they have. Study circles have led to ice cream socials, black and white ministers exchanging pulpits and congregations for a day, shared worship on common holidays, and a skating and study program attended by black and white children.

What's more, it's led to simple, every day friendships between people who might never have met.

Jessie Lee Long, a 58-year-old African-American, told of comforting a white woman whose husband warned her not to travel to the mostly black neighborhood where the study circle was being held. "I told her she had nothing to be afraid of," Long said.

"The people who participated didn't say 'Can we keep this going?'" said the Rev. James McLemore, Pastor at St. Paul A.M.E., one of the pilot churches. "They said we can't stop this."

It's people at the grass-roots level who are keeping the momentum going, McLemore said. "It's a relationship that has developed between these people. They've touched each other."

No one involved in the program claims study circles will reach everyone who needs it. In fact, they acknowledge that the most disenfranchised of Lima's community — on both sides of the racial spectrum — have barely been touched.

But with the program expanding into the schools and the business community, the dialogue can't help but eventually reach "everyone from the redneck to the radical," McLemore said.

Added Berger: "We don't pretend to have thought out, understood, or have the ability to get to everyone. But we've made an honest and aggressive beginning."

Special to The Times/KEITH CIRIEGIO

A man visits the Our Daily Bread kitchen in Lima, Ohio.

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8A SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 1995 THE TIMES

SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Study-circle idea spreads to schools and businesses

By DUNSTAN PRIAL
The Times

LIMA, Ohio — Dr. Robert Nagle, a psychologist in Lima, Ohio, said the city's study circles program — which brought blacks and whites together for discussions on race relations — could serve as the first step on a long, uphill path toward racial harmony.

But in the back of his mind, he knew a key ingredient was missing.

"I thought it was a good opportunity for people to talk to one another. I still do," he said recently. "But my thought was that enough wasn't being done with the kids."

So Nagle took it upon himself to bring the program to Lima's public schools.

Nagle is one of a number of past study circles participants applauded by the Lima City administration for expanding — with no prodding or assistance from city government — the scope of the program beyond Lima's church community.

In March, a group of high school students trained by Nagle and other graduates of adult study circles discussions traveled to a local middle school to talk about racial issues with eighth graders.

The school program is off to a good start, Nagle said, but, like its adult counterpart, the participants aren't necessarily the people who need it most, he said.

"If the churches can't get along, then how can we expect the rest of the community to get along."

Frances Napire, Lima councilwoman

Most of the adult study circles were attended by church-going, middle-class residents who were receptive to the goal of racial harmony among Lima's 45,000 residents.

"I'm not sure that we were reaching the less privileged and less socialized," Nagle said.

Lessie Lee Long agrees. Long, a 58-year-old African-American, says she is a perfect example of someone who didn't need the program.

"I get along with everyone," she said. "The people that should be here aren't here. The younger people — they're the ones who need it."

The program does have merit, Long said. Many whites, whose only perception of Lima's black communities stemmed from media accounts of crime and violence, feared attending meetings outside their own neighborhoods.

Those fears were quickly dispelled when they sat down with their black study circles partners. "I'm not going to bother anyone," she said laughing. "I don't bite."

Efforts are now under way in Lima to spread the concept to a wider audience.

Businesses in Lima have apparently seen the benefits of improving workplace race relations. British Petroleum Oil Company is starting study circles for its employees.

In addition, a group of churches, brought together through study circles, now help run a soup kitchen for alcoholics and the homeless living in Lima.

And young children are being touched by the effort, the result of a skating/tutoring program which stemmed from the study circle meetings between two white churches and a black church.

Frances Napire, a Lima councilwoman, has an 8-year-old granddaughter who has learned some Spanish from an Hispanic child. Both children participate in the skating/tutoring program. As many as 150 children attend the sessions on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

"These are good ways of bringing in people who might otherwise not have participated in the study circles program," Napire said, referring to the school and business efforts.

Meanwhile, in a mostly white, working class neighborhood just north of downtown, residents are skeptical that study circles can eliminate the drugs and crime that proliferate in Lima's inner city.

Everyone want to see an end to the drug-related violence, says Teena Williams, 25, a bartender. But when her bar is held up it's been a black man pointing the gun at her.

She says folks in her neighborhood are too busy making ends meet to concern themselves with race relations.

"These are working-class people. They work hard and live life day to day. I don't think they'd be interested because they just don't care."

As many as 150 children attend the twice-weekly skating and tutoring sessions.

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8A SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 1995 THE TIMES

SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Open letter to people of Shreveport

I would like to tell you about something exciting that has been happening in Lima, Ohio. I am a concerned citizen, and educator and was privileged to be a facilitator in a program that has touched many lives in Lima. This is a program that I feel has made a difference in our community. As I write this I am wearing a T-shirt that is a result of what happened in our city. The words on my T-shirt say "God Sees No Color."

Let me tell you our story. In 1992 following the Rodney King incident in Los Angeles, our mayor, David Berger, called Lima area clergy together in an effort to maintain peace in our racially diverse community. It became apparent that the pastors did not know each other but were eager for an opportunity to work together on the vital issue of race relations.

The search for a plan of action culminated when it was discovered that a group called Study Circles Resource Center in Pomfret, Ct., had developed an excellent discussion booklet designed to bring racially mixed, caring citizens together in groups to talk. At this point Ohio State University joined

Hagaman

with the clergy and the Lima City Administration to form a unique team.

The result of their effort was that approximately 1,200 area individuals came together in groups where blacks and whites sat down together and just got to know each other. This was done by pairing black and white churches and training lay facilitators, using the Study Circles material entitled "Can't We All Just Get Along?"

The best part of the story is that the project did not end with discussion. Many churches continued to fellowship and worship together. A food pantry was set up. All the Study Circles participants came together for a huge picnic on the Ohio State University branch campus. (It was at this event that the "God Sees No Color" T-shirts were distributed.) A Unity Choir was formed.

A "Discussion to Action" group still functions involving folks from many Study Circle groups. And the Can't We All Just Get Along Study Circles have now moved from the churches into the business community, the neighborhood associations and the high school.

Inquiries have come to us from many parts of the United States and it is a privilege for us to share the success of Study Circles on race relations with others who desire to bring all races into harmony as brothers and sisters.

Judith Hagaman

Hagaman, wife of Ron Hagaman, administrative coordinator for the City of Lima. She helped put together a study circle group at her church, and continues to be active in the program.

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8A SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 1995 THE TIMES

SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Shreveport following Lima's lead

By DUNSTAN PRIAL
The Times

Every other Thursday night, six people from diverse backgrounds meet in the evening at the YWCA in downtown Shreveport to discuss race relations.

Not the broader issues of how racism impacts the community, but how racism has affected them personally.

African-Americans in the study circle group relate past humiliations and their attempts to rise above discrimination and ignorance.

White members of the group tell of overcoming inherent racist beliefs handed down through the generations. Some, particularly women, can relate directly to accounts of subtle or not so subtle racial and gender discrimination.

Jane Malloy, executive director of the YWCA of Northwest Louisiana, hopes this group will spread the study circle program throughout the Shreveport community.

Study circles have been successful in Lima, Ohio, officials there say, because the program was started within the structured setting of the church community. The program was then allowed to expand on its own throughout the city.

The success of initial discussions on race relations in Lima have led to a new series of study circles focusing on violence in the community.

Malloy believes similar success is attainable in Shreveport.

The YWCA is in its second phase of study circles program. The first phase began last summer. Both sessions have focused on race relations.

"We're taking things one step at a time," Malloy said.

Two members of the current class are participating in the program with the intention of initiating programs at their respective churches, she said.

Malloy would also like to see children involved in discussions of race relations.

A study circles program sponsored by the Greater Shreveport Human Relations Commission is expected to begin in the next six weeks, said Joe Ann Dupard Akpan, executive director of the commission.

Akpan said 20 people have been recruited to participate in a six-session program entitled "Coming Together for Change."

Instead of focusing entirely on race relations, Akpan said the commission's study circles will also include discussions on gender equity, and equal opportunities for disabled people and gays and lesbians.

Ron Hagaman, a city administrator in Lima who has overseen the study circles program, strongly recommended bringing in church groups early on.

In Lima, residents introduced to study circles through their churches have taken the initiative to expand the program into the city's educational and business communities.

Without the grass-roots interest — developed within the churches — the momentum would have dwindled, Hagaman said.

The YWCA in Shreveport is looking for more participants, Malloy said. Anyone interested in joining a study circle on race relations in Shreveport should call the YWCA.

Gauging the success of the program will be difficult, she added.

"If you get somebody to change a notion, then you've had some impact. If we can get people to change their notions about other people, then we'll have been successful."

Who to call

Anyone interested in joining a study circle on race relations in Shreveport should call the YWCA at 222-2116.

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The Lima News

TUESDAY
JAN. 3, 1995
35 CENTS DAILY
$1.25 SUNDAY

Focus shifts to violence

STUDY CIRCLES: Black and white churches are being asked to consider problem.

By STEPHEN HUBA
The Lima News

Lima's churches, both black and white, are putting race on the back burner and turning their attention toward violence.

The 47 churches that participated in the "Can't We All Just Get Along" program are being asked to consider a new program — "Violence in the Community" — that uses the study-circle approach to problem solving.

"I'm hoping some of them will sign up like they did for the race relations study circles," said Ron Hagaman, administrative assistant for the city of Lima.

The new program will be introduced before 150 ministers from the Lima region, who have been invited to a breakfast meeting at the Old Barn Out Back restaurant at 8 a.m. next Tuesday. Martha McCoy, program coordinator for Study Circles Resource Center, Pomfret, Conn., will be the keynote speaker.

The meeting will include break-out sessions for ministers to review the new material. The third round of study circles, which already has the blessing of the 12-member clergy task force, will begin in mid-February.

Hagaman said the new focus does not mean that organized discussions about race relations will end. In fact, they are expanding beyond the churches and into schools, businesses and neighborhoods, he said.

"We have gone into the community at large with race relations. It's been taken to Lima Senior High School. Now they're thinking seriously about extending it into the junior high schools." In the private sector, "we've got two or three companies that are basically ready to go," he said.

One of the reasons for the third round is the desire, expressed by churches involved in the first two rounds, for continued dialogue between the races, Hagaman said.

"We've been fortunate, the way it's taken off and the way the community's received it," he said.

Two Lima churches — Zion Evangelical Lutheran and St. Paul AME — were paired on Feb. 9, 1993, to spearhead "Can't We All Just Get Along," a program co-sponsored by the city of Lima and Ohio State University-Lima.

In May 1993, 34 local churches and a Jewish synagogue were the first to participate in the racial study circles on a wider scale. About 800 people participated in this first round. The second round began in May 1994, with 26 churches participating. Each time, one or two white churches were paired with a black church.

The Lima model — a partnership of local government, higher education and churches — has been emulated by other communities across the country. But that is only half the story.

What has emerged from the first two rounds of study circles is a network of relationships between blacks and whites heretofore unknown in Lima, said Thomas Redding.

"It's entirely within the intention (of the program), which is that blacks and whites should meet and become friends. Building these relationships is going to have us in place for things that may happen in the future," said Redding, who belongs to the study circle group of St. John's Catholic, Shiloh Missionary Baptist and High Street United Methodist churches.

Redding said many churches have expanded their activities far beyond the original mandate of the program, to the point where a newsletter is needed to keep track of it all. They hold shared meals; they attend each other's churches; they volunteer at Our Daily Bread Too.

In Theresa Plaskey's group, members of St. Charles Catholic and Philippian Missionary Baptist churches recently attended a Hanukkah celebration at Temple Beth Israel-Shaare Zedek.

"By getting together, we've really gotten to know the people personally," Plaskey said. "When you first meet a person, you're just an acquaintance. But as you come together more often, then you learn about them and learn from them."

The parish, church and synagogue plan to continue their interreligious, interracial dialogue early in 1995. They will take the material used in the first two rounds and tailor it more specifically to Lima, Plaskey said.

The Rev. Robert Curtis Jr., a co-facilitator in the group, said he hopes the study circles begin to have an influence outside the walls of the churches.

"It's not the people who come to the study circles that need the help, but those who aren't coming," said Curtis, associate pastor of Philippian Missionary Baptist. "The more you get folks involved, the more the message gets spread."

Praise for program/A2

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A2 Tuesday, Jan. 3, 1995 The Lima News

Participants praise study circles

The "Can't We All Just Get Along" program is being heralded by those people who participated among the 47 Lima churches. A sampling of letters they wrote concerning the program appears below:

—

Having grown up in a large city — Milwaukee — I was used to more racial diversity than is common in the Lima area. I value friendships with people who are not exactly like I am. The richness to be gained from these friendships is what I sought through the study circles.

Also, I believe in the small-group approach to "big" change. (Industry does it through employee involvement groups.)

Perhaps the friendships formed in these circles will eventually heal some of the divisions that exist in Lima. Personally, I've enjoyed my visits to the South End! Hearing about their neighborhoods and churches or temples from those who live or worship in a different place than I do has enriched my life and given me a perspective I would not have had otherwise.

The only thing I would change about the circle concept is the limited time originally set up for meetings. So little can be accomplished in four or five meetings, beyond just beginning to get to know one another.

That's why I'm thrilled our group is going to go on meeting monthly. As time goes on, we want to become involved in a project that we will work on together to improve our community.

— Elaine Ladicks
parishioner, St. Charles Catholic Church

—

I must say that curiosity was a motivation that drew me to attend these meetings. I did not care much for the title or logo, "Can't We All Just Get Along," since it seems to oversimplify a destructive condition of our society. But I do believe that all the people attending are sincere and have a genuine desire to contribute to breaking down the walls of prejudice in our city.

Our faith teaches that we are to experience harmony and unity in the Body of Christ, so I believe that it is fitting that it start with the churches.

I have attended because it has provided an opportunity for me to share my experiences, background and viewpoints, and hear how others have experienced or reacted to prejudice in our community.

I believe that those of us who come make a statement by our presence that a problem exists and we are willing to be part of the solution.

I believe that developing relationships across racial and Christian denominational lines will take a great deal of commitment, interacting on a one-to-one and personal level, rather than promoting new government and other social programs.

Finally, I did expect to experience more time spent on our common ground regarding our faith heritage and background, being sensitive to the actual differences of each participant's faith.

— anonymous member, St. Charles Church

—

I came to the study circle to learn more about people.

I wanted to get a better understanding of why people seem to refuse to get together and learn to "truly love" one another, when it seems so much easier to be friends than to work so very hard at being enemies.

On a religious aspect, I wanted to discuss with other Christians why it is that we say we are all God's children, but we allow hatred, prejudice and racism to divide us.

If I say that I'm a Christian, then why would it seem so hard to show my fellow man that I care about what happens to him, that I care about his life, that I too want to live in a safe and friendly city?

It still amazes me how these are still stereotypes that need to be erased, so that *we* as a people can become *we* as a human race. I gain great insights that let me know there is much work to be done to eradicate racism — for racism can only remain alive if people who are concerned enough to make a change sit and do nothing.

Even the smallest friendly gestures can help someone rethink how they feel about a person or race. We must continue to talk; but even more so, we must put our talk into action.

For to eliminate many of today's problems we must take it moment by moment.

— Mary P. Monford, member, Philippian Missionary Baptist Church

—

(I participated in a study circle) to try to learn and understand how the other fellow feels and why he/she feels that way.

Obviously, at 60 years old and going through life reading, listening and watching news, etc., I've missed something. Why all the hate and disturbances amongst fellow human beings here in Lima? Is it because of background, lack of understanding, culture, race — what?

The meetings I attended have not supplied me the answers yet. However, we have discussed a lot of potential reasons. It is my belief that as we, a racially mixed group, keep thinking about these things, I will come to understand the other person's viewpoints.

As this understanding unfolds, my hope is that our group will have an impact on a much larger group, which in turn may end up benefiting all of Lima or more.

— Frank D. Kahle Sr. parishioner, St. Charles Catholic Church

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OBSERVER-DISPATCH

OPINION 10A

TUESDAY
Oct. 31, 1995

Clergy show the power of the message

What could draw 500 people out on a cold, dreary Sunday night to downtown Utica?

A hope, a dream, a need to gather to speak and act as one community.

Not the black community or the white community, as is unfortunately too often the case in the Mohawk Valley and this country.

Not to speak to white people about their problems, or black people about their problems.

But to address our mutual problem of ridding our one community of the kind of hate and hardheartedness that can leave an 18-year-old African-American unconscious at Fay and Court streets or a 34-year-old white American searching for refuge in Blandina Street homes from gun-toting attackers.

It was this hope, this dream, this need that drew the most remarkable and diverse cross-section of residents and public officials I have seen at any gathering in my three years here.

Unmistakably, in dramatic and inspiring fashion Sunday night, the Building Bridges effort led by area clergy and laity arrived in the Mohawk Valley.

And the Bridge Builders Religious Coalition showed its power to attract so many from suburb and city by endorsing the hope, the dream and the need — through the example of diversity in its ranks and personal relationships between its black and white members.

Sure, some public officials there were running for re-election. But others were not, from members of the city school administration to the state Legislature. They felt a need to be part of this powerful statement.

And this is the stuff of change, of grabbing and keeping the attention

Tim Chavez

of these public officials over the next year with the power of this night and its numbers. Then, we can start ridding our public institutions of those who give refuge to racism, ridding our neighborhoods of the desperation and economic desolation that leave people without hope, embittered and lashing out, and ridding our community of the walls between the races that in reality leave us less secure.

Any effort that can draw 500 people on a cold, dreary night is much more than a lot of talk; it is powerful action. And the powerful took notice.

Many moving words were spoken. But the evening belonged to the audience — their presence in great numbers making the loudest statement about condemning racial violence but also endorsing the hope, the dream and the need.

The sight of two friends, one white and one black, two pastors, standing at the same pulpit, at ease with one another as people, listening to one another, applauding one another, moved by one another — provided a glimpse of what is possible.

Upon such relationships, person by person, upon such trust, person by person, upon such respect, person by person, is the foundation for a better community for all the races.

The Rev. Patti Lawrence stressed the need to listen to each other. The Rev. Annabelle Anderson brought those gathered to their feet with an impassioned speech: "We have to start living what we preach about. We need to start acting the way God would be proud of."

Several organizations from the Oneida County NAACP to the Million Man March Committee to the African-American Coalition helped make this service possible. They also deserve credit. But it wasn't this organization or that organization that brought the multitude of people together. It was the membership each of us carries in God's organization — which remains our greatest common ground and the force which the Bridge Builders coalition continues to wield with a prophet's zeal.

"I believe in our community there are far more people of good will than ill will," declared the Rev. John Holt of New Hartford.

"Your presence here tonight signifies that. The problem is that many people of good will don't know what to do because we don't know each other. But even while we work in the black community and the white community, we must address the problem as a whole community."

Study circles over the next four months will offer that direction. More than 300 area people will regularly gather in much smaller groups than Sunday night.

But this time they'll be doing the talking and the crafting of relationships —to perpetuate the power of Sunday night person by person, prayer by prayer. These committed area residents are the seeds of even larger audiences at more services to heal and lead and re-energize our pursuit of the hope, the dream and the need of one community.

Tim Chavez is Opinion Page editor of the Observer-Dispatch.

Tim Chavez, Opinion page editor: **792-5063** **Russ Davis**, deputy Opinion page editor: **792-5006**

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OBSERVER-DISPATCH

OPINION

10A

TUESDAY
Oct. 31, 1995

Editorials

Healing can take many shapes

Few topics are as contentious, controversial and critical as race relations.

Yet this issue must be more fully addressed by the full Mohawk Valley as we struggle to come to grips with reality in the wake of national spectacles such as the reaction to the O.J. Simpson murder trial verdict and the uncovering of racist detective Mark Fuhrman, Million Man March of black males in Washington D.C., and brutal assaults in separate Utica cases involving white and black victims.

Fortunately for the region, a coalition of area clergy had already begun the task of building bridges between races. That effort allowed a first and important step at discussion and healing to take place Sunday night when 500 people from all walks of life attended a service at Utica's Tabernacle Baptist Church.

BUILDING BRIDGES

However, no matter how great the efforts of the Bridge Builders Religious Coalition, NAACP and other coalitions to bring this racially and socially Balkanized community together for study circle discussions and a service of healing, this is a deeper problem that requires more groups to join in the battle.

One of the first steps we all must take is to come to grips with the unpleasant, yet unmistakable, knowledge that racially motivated "hate crimes" do occur in Utica, N.Y. We'd rather consign all that to the high-profile cases that occur in major metro areas. But there is no more isolation for small cities. Denial will not help. Instead, let's take action, everywhere:

SCHOOLS: Race relations and hate crimes are too deep and critical an issue to be taught in the days around the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's January birthday. A region-wide day of teaching that brings students face to face with each other, and the reasons behind the headlines, can open a dialogue that must take precedence over lesson plans.

BUSINESSES: The underlying tensions between races can make offices a battleground. Businesses that can do so should consider giving their managers the time and skills needed to understand the racial gap, how to deal with it, and how to help others do so.

GOVERNMENT: After next week's election, the leaders of Utica, Rome and Oneida County need to discuss how they can help attack the cancer of racial polarization. Government cannot solve the problem. It can, however, help in furthering the environment of cooperation initiated by the Building Bridges effort where people come together.

All three groups should explore ways of using the clergy coalition to help them plan, teach or provide further resources for tackling a subject that few of us want to discuss in public, but even fewer do not discuss in private. Study circles remain one key option.

The incidents that have sparked discussion will fade from the headlines. But unless we all take steps to discuss the unmentionable and come to terms with the prejudices that are a barrier we all face, the underlying problems will not fade away, but grow stronger.

How to join Bridge Builders

More than 300 area residents are starting to meet to talk about racism and how it affects their lives and our community. This dialogue needs a diverse group of area residents by race and residence to ultimately transform this discussion into meaningful action across the Mohawk Valley. If you would like to be part of this effort, complete this coupon and mail it to:
BUILDING BRIDGES, 500 PLANT ST., UTICA, N.Y. 13502

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

PHONE: _____

AREA (Mark one): ___ S. Utica ___ N. Utica ___ E. Utica ___ W. Utica ___ Suburban

AGE: _____

RACE: _____

TIME OF DAY, WEEK MOST CONVENIENT: _____

For more information, contact the Rev. Patti Lawrence at 735-8586. Participants will be contacted about meeting times and places.

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LOS ANGELES TIMES WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1995 A1

'Day of Dialogue' Tries to Span Racial Gulf

■ Diversity: Across L.A., small groups meet to talk frankly—and to listen.

By JANE GROSS
TIMES URBAN AFFAIRS WRITER

With widespread agreement across Los Angeles that racial rifts are widening, this divided city set aside Tuesday to discuss the undiscussable: the fears and prejudices that have run rampant in the three weeks since the O.J. Simpson verdicts.

At nearly 100 sites across the city—churches and synagogues, schools and workplaces, community organizations and public auditoriums—Angelenos of all races and ethnicities gathered in small groups from early morning until late at night and, supervised by trained mediators, tried to abandon platitudes and talk frankly about race and how it has disfigured their lives and fragmented their city.

The Day of Dialogue on Race Relations, as the citywide talkathon was dubbed by its originator, Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas, was a hastily assembled event. But it nevertheless managed to attract thousands of residents troubled by the fissures of race and ethnicity that have plagued the city for years but have widened in the wake of the Simpson verdicts and the subsequent "Million Man March" last week in Washington.

"If we don't make it work here in L.A., we are in trouble," said Father Pedro Villarroya, a Spanish-born official in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, who turned out for bagels, coffee and strained conversation in the law library at the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, one of the day's host organizations. "I don't know where World War III will start, but it may be because of race."

Juanita Fleming, a neighborhood activist in Pico-Union who attended the same group, agreed.

"I feel sorry for us as a nation and a city," said Fleming, who is of mixed Mexican and Filipino descent and married to a white man. "It is getting worse, not better, and if we don't start interacting and communicating, we're not going to get through this."

Some of those who attended the discussion groups were liberal advocates or men and women involved in government and public policy, who acknowledged that they were preaching to the choir. But many of them said that even in their offices and social circles, the Simpson verdicts had unleashed racist remarks, flowing in all directions, rarely vocalized in progressive circles since the civil rights movement.

"The shock of the verdict caused a veneer to slip," said Carolyn Webb de Macias, chief of staff to Ridley-Thomas. "People are saying things to each other that they wouldn't have said three weeks ago."

Along with the public activists at Tuesday's discussion groups, there were neighborhood folks, along with the well-known ministers, anonymous parishioners, along with the city leaders, firefighters and clerks and college students at sites that included the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, Loyola Marymount University, Kol Tikvah Synagogue, the Watts Towers Art Center and the Victory Outreach Ministry, where Sen. Bill Bradley joined the gang members and ex-convicts.

"I believe the dialogue has to be deepened," the New Jersey Democrat said.

Some participants in the day's activities said that rather than racist talk, a heavier-than-usual curtain had fallen between the races in the wake of the verdicts. That was the consensus at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, where 20 office workers spoke of the "uncomfortable silence" that has reigned in the MTA lunchroom and in their neighborhoods in recent days.

"We were so afraid about what would happen to our personal relationships if we discussed those issues, because there are such deep feelings around them," said Phyllis Tucker, an African American MTA administrator.

And silence breeds misunderstanding. "What you think we think is not necessarily what we think; we just don't express ourselves," said Patricia Helm, a white MTA worker.

Some of Tuesday's exchanges were heated, which was encouraged by the mediators, local men and women trained by a Connecticut-based foundation called the Study Circles Resource Center, which has organized such racial round-tables in many small cities around the country, but never in a place so huge, complicated or divided as Los Angeles.

At the ACLU breakfast, for instance, two of the whites in the group, Laurrie Garner, an elderly neighborhood resident, and Capt. Nick Salicos of the Los Angeles Police Department's Rampart Division, seemed out of sync with the Latinos and African Americans as to whether race and ethnicity even matter.

Garner began the heated exchange by saying that she "loathed and despised" the need of some people to emphasize their ethnicity, to call themselves African Americans or Asian Americans. "That's like saying, 'We're American, but . . . ' " she said. "It's all those classifications that are tearing us apart."

She also blasted bilingual education and the tedium of translation from one language to another at various civic meetings. "If we don't communicate in the same language, we can't solve our problems."

Salicos similarly complained about groups insisting on their own identity. "Within our organization, we're all blue," Salicos said. "I wish that were the view of people in L.A., because I see what happens when people clamor for their own racial identity. I don't see why we have to get so hung up on background."

The nonwhites in the group took quick and angry exception. Conrado Terraza, a field organizer for Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg, noted that "my reality is that race does matter. You control the system. It's your system. No matter how successful I am, no matter how much money I make, I am always a Latino."

Then Sol Castro, a high school teacher, exploded. "Ma'am," he said, directing his remarks at Garner, "I've seen some of our kids dye their hair blond to pass for white and wear tinted contact lenses to make their eyes blue. When I wanted to play the saxophone in high school, the teacher said my lips were too fat. Don't tell us race doesn't matter!"

The grievances of the various ethnic groups were consistent from one end of the city to the other. African Americans told tales of others shunning them, as if fearful that everyone of their race was a mortal danger. At a discussion at the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, Bernie Wilsdon complained that white women tuck their purses under their arms at the sight of him. Oscar Voner described white drivers seeing him at intersections and locking their doors. And Deona Tucker said that when she's shopping, clerks follow her around the store.

The primary complaint among Latinos was that they felt absent from the dialogue in Los Angeles since the verdicts, when all the talk has been of black versus white. "You've left us out; you treat us like we were invisible," said Juanita Fleming, at the ACLU group.

Whites, for their part, dwelt on the injustices of affirmative action and the rhetoric of Louis Farrakhan, who led the "Million Man March." Typical of the first was Dave Rogers, a fireman who attended a discussion at a Downtown station house and said he had to wait three years to get hired while minorities found instant openings in the department. Typical of the second was an elderly woman at the Kol Tikvah synagogue in Woodland Hills who said it was "chilling" to hear that a man such as Farrakhan can rise to power.

Organizers of the day's events seemed buoyed by the turnout and the candor. But no one was predicting that one day of talk would work miracles. "We won't wake up Wednesday and say, 'Hallelujah, it's over,' " said Avis Ridley-Thomas, the councilman's wife, who runs the Dispute Resolution Program in the city attorney's office.

But miracles aside, there were small victories. One of the groups at the ACLU has scheduled a second gathering in a few weeks. One white man at a lunchtime discussion group at the city attorney's office vowed to organize social events with people of other races, because his contact with them now is limited to work hours. And groups all over the city that were set to meet for an hour or two instead talked into the afternoon.

"I think people were ready," said Councilman Ridley-Thomas. "And it's long overdue, long overdue. Residents of this city don't want to be stuck in this racial abyss."

Times staff writers Tony Olivo, Erin Texeira and Miles Corwin contributed to this story.

KEN LUBAS / Los Angeles Times

Jean Tillman, left, holds the attention of her Metropolitan Transportation Authority colleagues during one of the many dialogues on race.

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Chicago Tribune

Metro DuPage

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1995

Aurora unity campaign aims to lift veil of racism

By Hal Dardick
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Some Aurorans have told Mary Jane Hollis that she is opening Pandora's box, but she thinks it's already open even though people don't realize it.

Although the box in question does not contain every plague known to mankind, it does contain one of the primary ills of contemporary American society: the difficulty among increasingly polarized races.

"If we keep it [race relations] out of our awareness because of lack of recognition, then we can't discuss it openly and try to solve the problem," said Hollis, a communications consultant. "By making it an open dialogue, we won't be creating this kind of subterfuge against one another."

Hollis, through a program sponsored by the local YWCA, Aurora University and the city, is trying to start that dialogue. She is coordinating a program under which grass-roots study groups would be formed to discuss racial diversity, the problems that comes with it and, in the end, possible solutions.

Although the YWCA's 1971 mission statement already contained the goal of "elimination of racism," Hollis said she feels that not enough progress has been made in that direction, and that in fact, the current politics of division in this country is slowing or reversing the process.

"Although we have for many years in Aurora been working toward that imperative [elimination of racism] in every way we could, we felt it was moving too slow," Hollis said. "We feel that one of the things that is happening in our culture, and particularly in the Aurora community, is a great deal of polarization."

Aurora has a population of more than 100,000 people, about 12 percent of it African-American, 23 percent Hispanic and 1 percent Asian, according to the 1990 census.

Even though the city's first black alderman was re-elected two years ago, that outward sign of racial progress was also accompanied by division. A group of black former city employees accused Mayor David Pierce, who was running for re-election at the time, of being a racist.

Racial tensions rose to the surface last year when Armando Mendez, a 19-year-old Hispanic college student was killed by black gang members in a case of mistaken identity.

African-American community leaders moved at that time to ease tempers by forming a scholarship fund in his name.

Other issues with overtones of racial or sexual basis in Aurora in recent years include claims by Hispanic youths to the city's Human Rights Commission that they were being hassled by security guards at the Fox Valley Shopping Center; complaints to the City Council that black children are expelled too quickly from school when there's a disciplinary problem, pushing them into the city's street gang life; and controversy over the attempt in 1991 by Ald. Marc Roberts to pass legislation protecting gays and lesbians from discrimination.

To stimulate the dialogue that might help eliminate those kinds of conflicts in the future, Hollis has turned to a guidebook called: "Can't We All Just Get Along—A Manual for Discussion Programs on Racism and Race Relations." It was created by the non-profit Study Circles Resource Center in Pomfret, Conn., after the Los Angeles rioting following the Rodney King police beating verdict in 1992.

The program outlined in the guidebook has been praised by officials of Lima, Ohio, for helping defuse racial tensions in that city of 46,000 in 1993.

By September of that year, Lima Mayor David Berger said more than 1,000 people were brought together in study groups to discuss race relations, and some of the suggestions for increasing racial tolerance made by participants were initiated by the city and local businesses.

In Aurora, Hollis already has formed a steering committee of 25 community leaders representing the city's larger government and welfare organizations. The steering committee has met twice to define the project's mission for Aurora.

On March 9, the committee will conduct a seminar and meeting, complete with a videotape presentation on the program in Lima. Hollis hopes it will spur wide participation in the effort.

"It starts with dialogue, and hopefully ends up with positive action for the community," said YWCA Executive Director Marj Colley, who cautioned against expectations of simple, fast solutions.

"We, like all communities, are struggling with the issue, and there's no quick fix."

Hollis said she simply hopes "that people become sensitized to the issues and mitigate the polarity with which we live."

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JOURNAL STAR, Peoria Sunday, December 17, 1995 A3

'Day of Dialogue': talk of the town

☐ Response to pending event to help Peoria face its challenges has organizer hopeful

By PAM ADAMS
of the Journal Star

Race.

Racism.

Two little words, two very different definitions. In one form or another, one and/or the other weaves through the heart of most every critical challenge confronting Peoria.

Forget the O.J. Simpson verdict and Rodney King.

Focus on home and population decline; the tax base and poverty; commercial growth and the school district; riverfront development and low-income housing; teen pregnancy and health-care delivery; crime and cumulative voting.

Look west again, back to Los Angeles, the bitter aftermaths of both trials, and a simple yearning to move beyond anger to understanding.

Los Angeles residents called it a "Day of Dialogue." On that particular day in October, small racially and ethnically mixed group met throughout the city.

All they did was talk. But that was something they hadn't done before and something they needed to do before they could get on with resolving so many other challenges confronting Los Angeles.

Robin Graham saw media accounts of the "day" on television and wondered, "Why can't Peoria do that?"

She got on the telephone, called Los Angeles City Hall, then a Los Angeles city councilman. By the time she hung up, she had talked with an outfit in Pomfret, Conn., called Study Circles Resource Center, and the plan for Peoria's "Day of Dialogue" was rolling.

Since then, almost 50 area organizations, institutions and businesses have signed on as partners for Peoria's communitywide "Day of Dialogue" Jan. 10.

"There's been so much cooperation that the response has been quicker than the process," Graham said.

"Before I could finish a presentation to a group, they'd say 'Great idea, what do you want us to do?' Before we worked out a registration process, we had people wanting to register."

Graham, a longtime member of the organizing committee for an annual Martin Luther King Holiday celebration, originally saw the idea as part of a week of activities leading up to the King holiday.

But so many other organizations have become involved, it no longer can be called a 'King Holiday committee' event, she said.

The Heart of Illinois United Way's Information and Referral Service is the central registration site. Though the event is free, participants must register so that organizers can ensure similar numbers of whites and nonwhites at each site.

Bradley University is the host for a general communitywide session from 8:30 a.m. to noon. Small-group discussions of not more than 25 people will be from 6 to 8 p.m. at about 25 sites.

The list of partners includes the Jewish Federation of Peoria, the Muslim Education and Community Association, the city of Peoria, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Peoria Chamber of Commerce, the Tri-County Urban League, CommonPlace, Illinois Central College, Peoria School District 150, the Peoria Housing Authority, the Journal Star, WEEK-TV and WMBD-TV.

Area churches are participating as church pairs. For instance, members of predominantly black New Morning Star Baptist Church will gather with members of predominantly white First Baptist Church of Peoria.

Study Circles Resource Center, a nonprofit organization funded by the Toppsfield Foundation, has helped a number of cities, including Los Angeles and Peoria, organize communitywide dialogues to talk about race relations, crime and other critical community issues.

"In this case, the idea is to create a safe place for people to talk about race," said Francine Nichols of the resource center.

A representative of the resource center will come to Peoria this week to train group leaders for the small-group sessions.

"The whole idea is for us to learn to come together before a crisis, not after," Graham said.

To register, call the United Way Information and Referral Service, 674-7140.

5-25 **Study Circles Resource Center** ■ PO Box 203, 697 Pomfret St. ■ Pomfret, CT 06258
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The Columbus Dispatch Sunday, January 15, 1995 ■ Page 3B

Mike Munden/ Dispatch

Group leader Jim Stowe challenges racism study circle members to examine their own feelings about the issue.

150 attend racism study group, room overflows

By Felix Hoover
Dispatch Human Services Reporter

More people than a lobby hearing room of the Rhodes Tower could hold gathered to talk about racism.

About 150 people met Friday on the first floor of 30 E. Broad St. for "Coming Together for Change: Racism Study Circles — An Introduction."

After hearing from sponsoring organizations — the YWCA of Columbus, the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus, the Columbus Community Relations Commission and the Ohio Department of Human Services — participants split into groups of three to about 15.

"We want to get you talking," Community Relations Director James Stowe said, noting that the gathering was timed to be part of activities honoring slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Pilot study circles were set up in the summer, but yesterday's sessions were intended to give participants a sampler of how they work.

Sign-up cards were passed out so participants could say whether they might want to continue with a study circle, or possibly lead one. The goal is to set up at least 40 of the study groups throughout the city, Stowe said.

Many of yesterday's participants were state workers who attended on their lunch hours. Ohio Human Services Director Arnold Tompkins said the workers were encouraged to participate because allegations of racism often surface among state employees.

"If people sat down and talked, we could end a lot of this," he said.

"I think it's a first step toward bringing people together," said Halimah Duncan, a legal secretary at the Bricker & Eckler law firm. The firm sent both black and white workers to the study circles, she said.

Betsy Rhodes, of the Ohio Women's Policy and Research Commission, said study groups give people a way to exchange ideas. Hearing how someone in her circle rejected the racist attitudes of elders who were Ku Klux Klan members shows that change is possible, she said.

Mark Ealy, of the Ohio Department of Education, said he was pleased to see many whites present.

"Some whites genuinely care or they wouldn't have come," said Ealy, who is black.

Eliminating racism was written into the YWCA's mission statement in 1970, said Carmen Rivera-Watson, national training director for the YWCA. She attended to endorse the program on behalf of the national headquarters.

The national organization wants to use the Columbus program as a pilot in applying for a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Rivera-Watson said.

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